

ERSILIA
COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 1567:

ERSILIA.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

264 F

“O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.”

SHAKESPEARE.

1876.

The Right of Translation is reserved.

ERSILIA.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "MY LITTLE LADY."

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1876.

The Right of Translation is reserved.



BY THE

PROLOGUE

AUTHOR OF "MY LITTLE LADY"

He who writes these pages, searching through the dimness of the separating years for the memories of his youth, feels like one who, sailing from his native shores in darkest night, presently sees the day break once more over the grey waters, and the well-loved land rise dream-like from the waves. To that lonely watcher, looking back with forlorn eyes, perhaps, with an inexpressible longing in his heart, the mists seem all at once to lift, to melt away, revealing a land ruddy in the ruddy dawn, watched over by the morning star, a land fair with the promise of flowery meadows, of white-blossoming trees; he seems once more, as in a dream, to breathe the sweet dewy fragrance of the glen, to see the small folded daisies in the grass, to hear the chorus of awakening birds, to taste the nameless rapture of the summer dawn. Alas! the shore recedes, the morning-star sinks down, winds and waves, pipe and moan around. A tardy sun will



E R S I L I A.

PROLOGUE.

HE who writes these pages, searching through the dimness of the separating years for the memories of his youth, feels like one who, sailing from his native shores in darkest night, presently sees the day break once more over the grey waters, and the well-loved land rise dream-like from the waves. To that lonely watcher, looking back with forlorn eyes, perhaps, with an inexpressible longing in his heart, the mists seem all at once to lift, to melt away, revealing a land ruddy in the ruddy dawn, watched over by the morning star, a land fair with the promise of flowery meadows, of white-blossoming trees; he seems once more, as in a dream, to breathe the scent of dewy hawthorn in the glen, to see the small folded daisies in the grass, to hear the chorus of awakening birds, to taste the nameless rapture of the summer dawn. Alas! the shore recedes, the morning-star sinks down, winds and waves pipe and moan around. A tardy sun will

presently gleam again, kindly breezes will yet waft the wanderer on his way, but the gracious promise that crowned the glory of that morning-land is gone for ever.

So he, who writes these words, sees once more, as in a clear vision, the blossoming years, the far gleaming spaces, the storms and darkness of his youth.

I HAVE a little daughter Fanny, a trim little maiden of seven years old, with light curling hair and blue eyes and shining black shoes, in which she goes trotting round her father's studio looking at the pictures he is painting, and giving her opinion on them very freely and more honestly, perhaps, than some of his critics. Fanny does not, indeed, profess to care much about pictures, and owns at times with great frankness that she thinks them all very dull; but she has her favourites among them nevertheless, and is not a little affronted when coming again, as sometimes happens, to look at one of these, she finds it has been sent away, never to return. In her disappointment, she will turn then to a half-finished portrait which, as it always stands in the same place, it pleases the child to call her own.

"This is my picture," she will say, standing to

contemplate it with her hands clasped behind her back, "my beautiful Princess Ersilia. What was her other name, papa? The name I always forget?"

"Princess Zaraikine," he says. He has answered the same question many times before, but no doubt the queer syllables slip out of the child's little brain.

"Princess Zaraikine," she repeats, "I like Princess Ersilia best—my beautiful Princess and cousin. Why have you never finished the picture, papa?"

"It was not I who began it, Fanny," he answers, "it was painted by my master, a far greater artist than I, who did not live to complete it. He died many years ago."

"185—" she says, spelling out a date in the corner of the picture, "why that is—let me see—that is more than twenty years ago. But I know whom you mean, papa, the gentleman who used to live in this room, and made those funny sketches on the wall. You have never finished those either; why don't you, papa? You can paint very nicely too," and then, without waiting for an answer, Fanny skips off to the window, and peeps through the shutter to look down into the street below, a Paris street, where she can see the winter sun shining on white houses and porte-cochères, soldiers

passing, ladies walking, carriages rattling by—it is more amusing to Fanny than all the pictures in the world.

Presently her *bonne* knocks at the door, "It is time for Mademoiselle to come for her walk." Mademoiselle jumps up joyfully from the window and runs to get ready. She climbs a chair that she may put her arms round her father's neck, and kiss him before she goes out. She pulls his grizzled beard, and the locks that are getting white on his temples and thin on the top of his head; she dives into his pockets to find *sous* wherewith to buy cakes in the Champs Elysées. Fanny and her father are very fond of each other, for they are almost alone in the world, and the little maiden still wears a black frock for the mother who died scarcely a year ago. But they have not much to say to each other nevertheless, and he sometimes thinks that the child is happier with her dolls, and her rags, and her nurse, than during the dutiful half-hour she spends in the studio where there are a hundred things her busy fingers may not touch, and where a grim, silent papa sits and stands painting all the day long. She skips gleefully away now, the sound of her chatter and laughter dying in the distance. Presently will be heard the clatter of little feet as she returns from her walk, but no more will be

seen of her till she comes in her little blue dressing-gown to wish her father good night, and to roast chestnuts on the stove. It is Fanny's winter treat, and the one moment in the day, perhaps, when she thinks a papa is good for something. She will know better a few years hence, when she will come to him for ball-dresses, trinkets, opera-tickets, what not—already he foresees the time when she will plait up her pretty hair, put jewels in her ears, and satin slippers on her feet, and be content with nothing less than two balls a night.

Fanny then runs joyfully away; but though the child is gone, her careless questions, her heedless words still echo in her father's ears; and presently, as it grows dusk, he lays aside his brushes, he lights his pipe, and sitting down by the fire, he begins to think with tenderness and melancholy of a time five-and-twenty years ago. And as he thinks, the little parable that is written above comes into his head, for it is a time that has in it a glow as of red morning-clouds, the glow of a boy's first love.

This lonely man who sits smoking and dreaming over the fire, had a passionate love-story in his youth; but a sudden darkness fell on it, and out of it he has saved no token such as some men cherish and forget—no flower, or knot of faded ribbon, or

lock of hair. The shining eyes, at whose light he worshipped, never brightened nor fell at his approach; the fair, kind hand that frankly met his own never trembled at his touch, and it is less of himself than of another, whose name passed into silence years ago, that he thinks, looking back upon a past in which his own share was too often one of youthful passion, error, folly.

Out of that past he himself alone survives and remembers; for a fate, relentless to death, swept across his path, and he found himself alone among alien lives that had no conscience of his past. In this very studio, sacred to him through the memories that make the pathos of familiar rooms, where in the course of years many have come and gone and one life alone remains—in this very room, where the portfolios still bear that silent name, and the sketches on the walls were traced by a hand long since quiet, a new life is springing up; a child's eyes are busy day by day weaving new fancies, new associations, investing all around her with the romance of a fresh child's world that knows nothing of the years that have been. Shall the memory of those years die for ever?

As he thinks of these things, this lonely dreamer rises and paces the dim room. In all these years it is scarcely altered; the very shadows are un-

changed, and the fire-light throws the same wavering outlines on the same accustomed spots. The little old piano in the corner by the window whose worn notes jingle into strange discords now, once made harmonious answer to slender fingers that touched it; on the top lie some dusty folios of music, on which the name Ersilia Zaraikine can still be read in faded ink. (A woman's jealous hand once removed them, but somehow they found their way back to the old place again). In yonder drawer lies a little gold-fitted *étui*, and a half-embroidered handkerchief; they were left there more than twenty years ago by a hand that never cared to reclaim them. This man is no solitary hermit watching over the relics of his dead; the eager life of his contemporaries has claimed and had in him a willing share; but a profound melancholy stirs within him now, as he contrasts this passionless indifference of his inanimate surroundings with the passionate onward sweep of events, which has left only these barren landmarks to show the spot once made radiant by the fleeting presence of a fair and noble woman.

To her memory he devotes these pages. He loved that noble lady, for whose most sweet and pure sake he believes in the Heaven that opened to receive her, in the fair saints who thronged to wel-

come her, in the golden light in which she moves amongst the angels or muses apart amidst the immortal flowers. He loved her at a time when life was intense with the enthusiasms that give a purpose to youth, and keen with the joys and sorrows that are the inspiration for all the dim years that come after—the years that seem to mock men by the irony of their contrast with this splendour of early hopes. He loved her, and to him she was herself the inspiration and the splendour. In the world's struggle since then, he has borne, he trusts, no listless dreamer's part; but something, he thinks, passed from him with the passing of her presence from the earth; something within him fell silent when her voice fell into silence for ever.

In memory of Ersilia Zaraikine then he writes these words that follow.

CHAPTER I.

Introductory.

THE snows that all the winter through fall silently behind a veil of whirling clouds and mist, or shine in clear sun-settings and sun-risings on the great Pyrenean peaks retreat swiftly before the lengthening days of early summer to the sunless hollows of the upper precipices, leaving below a world of streams, and forests, and pastures, where grass is springing, and trees are bursting into sudden leaf, and the long-frozen air is shaken with the noise of falling waters. There is the sound of water everywhere, from the trickle of the tiny fall that drips from rock to rock into basins fringed with purple flowers, to the dash of the cascade that leaps impetuously from some fissure in the wall of mountain cliff, or the roar of the torrent as it rushes over black boulders in the gorge below, churning its deep water into creamy foam tinged with tenderest green. The very snow-wreaths, dying without a murmur on the warm breast of the mountain-slopes, wake to a new and musical life in the little, low-voiced rills that wind amongst the long grass.

There is rich store of flowers to be found in these upland pastures long after their brethren of the plain have passed away, and in yonder woods there is the dim blossom of the raspberry, and the fragrance of the small, wild-flavoured strawberry. The mountain girls well know where to seek for the earliest of these amongst last year's fallen leaves; one may see them coming down the road with flying garments and square-folded capulets, bearing on their heads baskets of these scarlet spoils, or great bundles of firm, white, new-pressed curds, the mountain cheese. In the upper gorges, where the ear is filled with the rush of the pent-in torrent, and the sunshine itself seems to borrow a shade of gloom from the early falling shadows, all day long may be heard the tinkling of bells as the long-haired shepherds lead their flocks and herds to those flowery, rill-watered *plateaux* far up the mountain-side. But in the lower valleys there is a sunny peaceful stillness, for there the road has space to turn aside from the torrent's edge and winds downwards amongst trees and hedges, between fields bright with the vivid green of the broad-leaved maize, beneath steep, overhanging meadows, where women are tossing and turning the early hay, filling the air with the delicious freshness of the new-mown grass.

I know those mountains well; I know that glad awakening of a sweet idyllic life, that swift rush of vitality, of the bounteous growth, the large careless fertility of a mountain summer beneath southern skies. I know those soft green lawns hidden like kind surprises amidst the forests, and I know the forests themselves, where slender birch-trees rise from an undergrowth of box and bracken, and where, between moss-grown trunks one looks into another world of purple peaks rising above slow-shifting clouds; whilst far below perhaps, shining in the mid-day sun, or peacefully reposing in the early shadow drawn by the protecting mountains, lies the little cluster of white houses that marks the site of some Pyrenean bath. All through the winter months these upper villages lie silent and deserted, shrouded in snow and mists, but with the returning summer they also awaken to a brief and joyous life; a life by no means idyllic, yet not without a certain piquancy derived from the irrelevance of its details to the solemn scenes amidst which it is cast—like a trivial ornament traced by some fugitive hand at the feet of a serene colossal statue, which the first passing storm suffices to efface.

It was at one of these baths, at the little village of the Eaux-Bonnes, that three or four of the people with whom we are most concerned in this history

spent a few weeks five-and-twenty years ago, in the midst of the noise and bustle, the water-drinking and bathing, the dancing and fiddling that go to make up that brief summer life of a mountain watering-place. An English gentleman alighting one evening from the top of a diligence at the door of one of the principal hotels, looked round half-amused, half-dismayed on the varied, many-coloured scene. He had come lumbering up that day from the stifling atmosphere of a half-deserted town in the plains below, and he found here a fresh mountain breeze, cool shadows, animation, life, movement everywhere. The sun had set, but the air was suffused with a soft radiance, and far overhead to the left a peak rose still glowing above the dark forests at its feet. Down below, hotel bells were ringing, whips were cracking, riding parties came clattering in; music was going on under the trees, and people who had been sitting there all the afternoon working, reading, smoking, or eating ices, still lingered, unwilling to exchange the coolness outside for the heated glare of the *table-d'hôte*.

"This is the Hôtel de —, I think," the gentleman said, giving his portmanteau to a waiter who stood lounging in the doorway. "Can I have a room here? I came to inquire for some one—"

whom I see coming across the Place at this moment," he added quickly.

Three people were coming towards him across the tree-planted Place, round two sides of which the little town was built. One of them was a woman, so fair that as she passed along, tall, slender and dressed in white under the gloom of the rustling trees, more than one head was turned to look at her again. In her whole appearance there was something at once noble and simple; she walked with an erect poise of the head, and a perfectly natural ease and dignity; her brown hair was half-concealed by a straw hat; in one hand she held gathered together the folds of her dress, in the other a bunch of mountain flowers. At her side walked a pale, slight, black-haired, grey-eyed lad of nineteen or so, carrying a sketch book and paint box. A little behind them, lingering to send sharp glances to the right and left amongst the groups of people, came a short, elderly lady dressed in black, whilst a mountain-boy laden with cloaks and umbrellas followed the party at no great distance.

That fairest woman was Ersilia, Princess Zairaikine. Her elderly companion was a distant connection and an old friend, Mademoiselle Mathilde de Brisac. The lad at her side was her

cousin, one Humphrey Randolph, artist, enthusiast, student at Paris in the atelier of the well-known painter Arthur Fleming—a genius who was to do great things and astonish the world some day, so at least one kind voice would say, whose accents, sweetest on earth to the lad, would often cheer and encourage him, despondent perhaps over his work. I know not how that may have been; a sorrow has fallen upon him since then, a tragedy that seemed for a time to blot the sun from his heavens, and leave him groping in an outer darkness, lies between him and those days, vivid with golden light, radiant with a tender beauty. He it is who writes these lines, looking back upon his youth across that separating gulph of darkness and sorrow and despair.

These two in front then, who had been spending the summer's day in the forests far up the mountain-side, walked on together, followed by Mademoiselle de Brisac, who had joined them as they entered the Place. Randolph was talking as they came along. He was generally held, I believe, to be a somewhat silent and moody lad; a good deal of diffidence, and a great capacity for being bored made it always easier for him to be silent than to talk in society; only when with the Princess Zaraikine words came to him readily, and

speech seemed better than silence. And yet why should I say so? With her, talking was sweet, but it was sweet also to be silent, and it was her presence that made the sweetness and the joy.

"Of course, I want to see Rome more than any other place in the world," he was saying to her now, as they walked on together, "and I mean to go there and all over Italy some day; but I suppose I care less about it now than I should otherwise do, because I could not leave Mr. Fleming. If you knew him—and if he comes here you will know him—you would understand my feeling."

"I do understand, Humphrey," she answered. Her voice was clear, full, and harmonious, with a melancholy tone now and then. Her eyes, too, which were grey and of great depth and purity of colour, had, when her face was in repose, an expression of melancholy and of the reserve that seems to hold hidden depths of thought; but as she spoke and looked at the lad, they brightened with a sweet and frank kindness. "I quite understand," she said, "that you would not like to leave Mr. Fleming, and you will not care less for Italy because you put off going there for a year or two. I sometimes feel sorry to have known Rome ever since I was a little girl of ten years old; I should like to have read and thought a great deal more

about it before going there for the first time. I think there is a first love that one has for places before seeing them, that one always regrets losing even through a knowledge of the reality."

"It is a love that I have all my life had for Rome," Humphrey answered, "my mother was always talking to me about the year she spent there. I believe it became a sort of beatific vision that kept her alive through all her after-years of bread-making and butter-making. And then I was born in Rome, you know; I spent the first six months of my life there, and I can hardly believe that I have no remembrance at all of that time. One has all sorts of vague beautiful memories that one cannot date; and I always like to think that some of mine belong to Rome."

"If your memories of Rome are beautiful, they are very different from mine, Mr. Humphrey," said Mademoiselle de Brisac, suddenly joining in the conversation, "for five years I endured that city of dirt, and fleas, and beggars, and please Heaven I will never set foot in it again. The dulness alone is enough to kill one, at any rate in the house of my excellent brother-in-law, who, if I may say so of him now, poor man, had a perfect genius for dulness. I adore pictures and statues like everyone else, but one does not care to spend one's

entire life in a posture of adoration—that is easily understood.”

“Is that your experience of Rome, Mademoiselle?” said Humphrey. “I imagined it to be a place where people can amuse themselves just as they please.”

“Not at all,” said Mademoiselle Mathilde, “the English have spoilt it, as they spoil every place they go to. They raise the prices by their extravagant amusements which amuse nobody, and render a refined and rational society—society in the real sense of the word — impossible.”

“*Merci du compliment*, Mademoiselle,” said Humphrey, unable to help laughing at these original remarks.

“You may laugh, Mr. Humphrey, but what I say is perfectly true. At my brother-in-law’s receptions, for instance, the English used to swarm, and the result was that anything like a sustained or well-conducted conversation was out of the question. In Paris, next winter, where I shall have a salon of my own, and where I hope to revive some of the old traditions of good society—you will see that things will be very different. I will have no men crowding together to talk in corners, or flirting with the silliest girls in the room, while the rest of the women yawn apart. I declare to

you that I never see one of your great Englishmen, with a sad face and a long beard, come lounging along without beginning to yawn myself—I see one approaching us at this moment, and I already begin to feel sleepy. Is it anyone you know, Mr. Humphrey? He seems to be coming straight towards us.”

Humphrey looked up, and saw, indeed, before him a familiar form—a tall, thin, broad-shouldered man, with a slight stoop and loose-hanging clothes, coming towards them, with long steps and a bent head.

“It is Mr. Fleming,” said the lad, springing forward gladly. “When did you arrive, Sir?” he said, as his master’s hand met his with a kind grasp, “I did not expect you so soon.”

“I have only just arrived,” Mr. Fleming said. “I have left my portmanteau at your hotel, Humphrey, and was inquiring for you, when I saw you coming across the Place.”

“I have been up the mountains with the Princess Zaraikine,” Humphrey answered. He turned, and went back a few steps to his companion. “This is Mr. Fleming,” he said, with an abrupt boyish eagerness.

She held out her hand quite simply and frankly, “I am very glad to see you, Mr. Fleming,” she

said. "My cousin Humphrey has been looking forward every day to your arrival."

He took the hand she gave him, he looked at the fair face before him—it is a moment that Randolph sees still through the twilight of the intervening years in which a hundred trivial details fade, and leave these two standing alone against the tranquil background of evening mountains rising clear against the evening sky. The next moment Mademoiselle Mathilde came hurrying up with a curtsey, as she was presented to Mr. Fleming. The music had ceased by this time, and the people were streaming by in the swift-falling dusk.

"Is nobody going in?" said Mademoiselle Mathilde, "our dinner must certainly be ready by this time, Ersilia, and I am starving. I have had nothing to eat since the morning but a little cream-cake. I am not like you English who lunch upon hot chicken and cold pudding at one o'clock—"

Humphrey and his master stood watching the two figures as they walked side by side towards the hotel, and they also began to move more slowly in the same direction.

"I have missed you, Humphrey," Mr. Fleming said, putting his hand affectionately on the lad's shoulder, as they walked on together. "I have

been ill, and I have had no one to make my coffee as I like it. I have had visitors, and no one to take them round my studio, and tell them how fine all my pictures are."

"Have you been ill, Sir?" said Humphrey. "Why did you not let me know? I would have come to you at once."

"All the way to Paris? Well, I believe you would, Humphrey; but you see I was not so bad as all that. It was only the heat that knocked me up at last; Paris was like a white furnace by day, and a heated oven by night. I used to lie awake and dream of streams and green fields that I could never reach; but at last there came a day's rain, and I was all right again. And how are you, my boy? You look better than when you left Paris."

"I never was better in my life," said Humphrey. "Tell me what visitors you had, Sir. I should not have thought there was a soul left in Paris."

"That is exactly what Mrs. Grey said, when she came to see me the other day. 'Dear me, Mr. Fleming,' she cried, 'who would have thought of finding you here still? I came by the merest chance, in the merest hope of seeing you. I thought there was not a soul left in Paris. Who could have

expected to find you?' 'And why not, Madam,' I replied, 'since you also are here?' 'Oh, but I am not here,' she said; 'that is, I arrived only yesterday from Brussels, and I leave again next week for the Pyrenees.' You don't know Mrs. Grey, Humphrey, but she is an old acquaintance of mine; and of all pseudo-fine ladies she is the most intolerable. You would have enjoyed taking her round the studio; she went into ecstasies over everything, and when she came to your picture which was standing in one corner—the one, you know, into which you have put that fine flaming sunset, and which we agreed was not the finest work of art the world has yet seen—well, when she came to that, she fairly went down on her knees on the floor before it. 'Oh, Mr. Fleming,' she cried, 'what genius! what sentiment! what a beautiful mind you must have! such poetry, you know—it thrills one!' 'That is not mine, Madam,' I said, 'it was painted by my pupil, a very promising lad of nineteen.' She got up off her knees in a great hurry. 'Indeed!' she said. 'Yes, now I look at it again, it is fine—very fine—but it is not *the* master touch. Still it is promising, as you say, very promising. Charlotte, my dear, come and look at this picture painted by a young man only nineteen. Ah, there is something I must look at! *This* is yours, Mr. Fleming!' and so on."

"And who is Charlotte?" asked Humphrey, greatly amused by this recital.

"Charlotte is a niece that Mrs. Grey brought with her; a pretty little gentle girl, not at all like her aunt. You would like to know her opinion of your picture, Humphrey, but I cannot give it you, for she looked scared out of her wits, and did not speak a word. You can ask her yourself, when you see her, for Mrs. Grey told me she was coming here in a few days, and I know that nothing will prevent her finding me out. I shall hand her over to you, Humphrey. I shall present you to her as the promising young man of genius whose picture she admired so much. She is full of soul, and will just suit a sentimental young fellow like you."

"I would rather have the niece who says nothing, Sir," the lad answered, laughing. They had reached the door of the hotel by this time; but before they entered, Humphrey turned and grasped his master's hand again, for very gladness at seeing him once more. He seems still to see that kind, sad, tired face, with the golden, grizzled beard and moustaches, the thin brown hair that fell over his forehead, and had to be pushed off again and again, with a familiar gesture; a face worn with lines of care and thought—the face of a man looking older than his years, but which for those who

loved him and whom he loved, had in it I know not what of sweetness and kindness, of tender, genial humour. Randolph had neither father nor brother, and in all the world he loved no man so well as his master, Arthur Fleming.

CHAPTER II.

Family History.

WHEN the present writer was quite a little boy—not much more than nine years old—his mother called him one April morning away from the river side, where he was playing by himself. “Humphrey,” she said, “I have just had a letter from your uncle; you are to go and stay with him for a few days at his house in Kensington, and you must get ready at once, for the coach will pass in an hour,” and then, whilst she went about the preparations for his journey, she gave the boy more than one exhortation to which he listened with mingled exultation and awe, for he had never seen his uncle, nor within his own recollection had he ever before been from home.

This home, in which he had thus spent all his earliest years, was a large farm in ——shire, and the remembrance of it makes Randolph’s childhood

—that dim, enchanted borderland, lying between the unknown whence we came, and the years in which we learn to live a conscious life—it makes his childhood, I say, appear to him like some sweet, abiding pastoral background to all the shifting scenes that followed. It was a pleasant, open, fertile country in which he lived, where the sky dipped on every side to meet the level horizon, and there was little save trees and haystacks to break the view of earth and heaven. Red sunsets burned low behind the low black hedges, flat meadows stretched down to the stream which, bordered here and there by trees and bushes, flowed clear and shallow amongst them—meadows golden with buttercups in spring, sweet with flowering grasses in summer, where Humphrey's guilty flying feet left a long, shining track, as he sped across to reach his favourite haunts by the river. He would be content to lie for hours on those grassy banks in the long spring and summer days. He was a somewhat weakly, ailing child, with small strength or taste for rough boyish sports; but like many lonely children he had learned to be happy enough by himself, and had a passionate love for the flowers and grasses, the humming, buzzing, creeping world around him. It was a sort of regret to him to find, on re-visiting these childish haunts after his first school days, that

he had grown so tall as to quite over-top those early playfellows, and that his eyes were now so far above the level of the ox-eye daisies, the tall rushes, the crimson flowering spikes of the water-plants. He had grown beyond them, as he had grown beyond the time when each new budding thing was still a sweet surprise, and when the further bend of the river—beyond which he never went—suggested a wider range of possibilities than the whole world affords now, and made the yearning belief in some vague sunset land where one might wander onwards for ever without penetrating to a familiar other side, seem one not wholly vain.

Beyond the meadows and the apple orchards, the corn-ricks and the haystacks, stood the substantial farm where Humphrey lived. He remembers well the ample kitchen stretching from back to front of the house, the wide dairy, the shining best parlour, where relics of a past that had a mysterious charm for little Humphrey stood amongst the old-fashioned furniture. Sketches of Rome and Florence, a small martyred St. Cecilia in white marble, a Roman lamp, an ivory model of the leaning tower of Pisa, these and other mementoes of an Italian tour, such as people used to bring back in old times, created a romance for the child in the

midst of the homely farm life that no succeeding years could efface. He remembers too the adjoining room into which he used to peep, and fly, and peep again, fascinated by the sight of a white-haired old grandfather, sitting stiff and rheumatic among his money-bags and account-books, with a big knotted stick at his side, which he could shake with emphasis at any rash intruder who popped an uncalled-for head in at the door; and he remembers the little brown bedroom above, with the window that a wide-spreading cherry tree seemed to fill with white blossoms and red and white fruit all the year round, and the bed with the blue-checked counterpane, where Humphrey in the early dawn would lie listening with a happy heart to the sounds of awakening life, cocks crowing, birds twittering, farm-labourers passing to and fro, talking with gruff echoing voices in the morning air, till the boy could lie and listen no longer, but, slipping on his clothes, would run out to take his part in that fresh stir, whilst the grass was still grey with dew, and the old farm buildings golden in the sun's level rays.

In and about these scenes of varied life, now feeding the poultry, now inspecting the pigs and the cows, now picking up fallen apples in the orchard, and anon helping Betty with the butter-

making or taking a turn with Molly at the bread-making, there moved a woman, who, in those early days, had still the freshness of youth, but who, as Humphrey best remembers her, had a thin, pale, careworn face, with auburn hair already mixed with grey smoothed back under her plain cap. My mother, I think, can never have been beautiful, but her quick, brown eyes were full of sympathy and intelligence, and her face lives in her son's memory with the idealized charm that belongs to a countenance we have learned to interpret by the underlying character that has moulded it. She had the calmest judgment, the clearest common sense, the most perfect faculty for discerning and adapting means to an end of any woman I ever knew—all crossed and frustrated at times by sudden tender impulses that made the loveable weaknesses of an admirable nature. I seem to see her yet as she moved about kitchen, and farm-yard, and dairy, often with her little lad clinging to her skirts, giving her orders with a prompt decision, a thorough knowledge of details that forbade dispute or hesitation in obeying them.

Something of the story of her early years, of how my father first met her, wooed and married her, Humphrey heard when he was a lad. But it was at a time when he was still young enough for

the stories of a former generation to have about them an unreal sentiment of faded romance, and in after-years, when he would willingly have learnt more, all the principal actors were dead. Such of the facts, however, as were patent to everybody he knew well enough, and he cannot remember the time when he was not familiar with what, to his childish imagination, seemed some far-off legend of a rich great-uncle who was a grand gentleman with a fine house in London, and whom Humphrey was to go and see one day when he should be big enough.

My father was eight-and-twenty when he married, old enough one would think to know his own mind and take his own way in life. Nevertheless, belonging as he did to an old and wealthy county-family, it was not perhaps astonishing, as the world goes, that his marriage with a woman however admirable, in a rank of life so much beneath his own, should have given great offence to his own people, and to no one more than to his uncle, Mr. Randolph, who, himself without a son, had adopted this orphan child of a younger brother. The Randolph estates were unentailed, but they had always hitherto gone in the male line, and Mr. Randolph, their present possessor, had early made up his mind to satisfy at once his family pride and his

fatherly affection by marrying his nephew to his only daughter Margaret. Three years before my father's marriage, an end had been put to this plan for the time by Margaret Randolph's falling in love with and marrying the Comte de Florian, a French gentleman of great wealth. The marriage was one too unexceptionable in every way for Mr. Randolph to refuse his consent to it; but when, two years later, Monsieur de Florian died, and his young widow with her little daughter Ersilia returned to live in her father's house in Kensington, those old schemes and hopes revived perhaps, to be once more frustrated by his nephew's marriage with a farmer's daughter.

Mr. Randolph refused to recognize the marriage, or to see his nephew again, and my father took his wife first to Paris, and then to Rome for the winter. It was not the first time that the nephew and uncle's schemes of life had clashed. Both came of a family in which political life was a strong tradition. Mr. Randolph himself, like his father and grandfather before him, had entered Parliament when quite a young man, and had probably very early set his heart on seeing his nephew follow in the same well-worn tracks. But that nephew presented the oft repeated, but always perplexing phenomenon of an individuality that will assert itself

in defiance of the best ascertained precedents. With him a new spirit entered the old Randolph family. He grew up a refined, amiable, unpractical lad, with a turn for painting, but for nothing else, and a certain sensitiveness of temperament that made him shrink from the publicity of a Parliamentary life. Mr. Randolph did his best with this hard problem with which fate had provided him—that is to say, he ignored it as much as possible, as men will ignore problems that are quite beyond the range of their sympathies and experience. He gave his nephew what in after-years, in contradistinction to that nephew's tastes perhaps, he emphatically termed the education of a gentleman. He sent him to Eton, and to college, and then abroad for a year or two, which the lad spent in Italy studying as best he could, the art he loved, in which he then and afterwards attained to some proficiency. But on his return to England his uncle forbade these favourite studies; and presently, on a dissolution of Parliament, the young man, at Mr. Randolph's urgent desire, went down to stand as candidate for a small borough where the Randolphs had some local interest.

He lost his election, to his own great relief; but when on his return to London Mr. Randolph, with no small irritation, asked him what the devil

he meant to do with himself now, the question remained without an answer. He was in a great measure dependent on his uncle, and he passed the next few years, I imagine, in the somewhat purposeless way that results from a compromise between two conflicting sets of beliefs, in a mind wanting in the courage necessary for decided action. My father was an artist by nature and by choice, but he was probably not uninfluenced by his uncle's old-fashioned creed—I write of fifty years since—that it was in the buying, not in the painting of pictures that the love of art should be shown by a gentleman. It was only after his marriage, when an independent course of action was forced upon him, and when, as I cannot but think, my mother's straightforward influence was brought to bear, that he applied himself in earnest to painting—with what chances of ultimate success cannot now be calculated, for he died at the end of that winter in Rome, hardly eighteen months after his marriage, and when his little son was but four months old.

This history, which he has thus given in brief outline, Humphrey heard in early life. Of his father, he had of course no personal knowledge; but his mother never wearied of talking of him, and one who knew and loved him well—my master, Arthur Fleming—often spoke of him as having been a

man of a most sweet, generous, and open temper, with an extraordinary power of attracting and attaching to himself friends; a man of refined, æsthetic tastes, but as one may judge with no great originality of genius, and lacking the concentrated purpose and depths of mind necessary for a great artist, or for achieving greatness, perhaps, in any form.

After my father's death, a sort of reconciliation took place between my mother and her husband's family, partly brought about, I believe, by Madame de Florian, who still lived in her old home, devoted to the memory of her husband, and to her little daughter Ersilia. Mr. Randolph went down into the country to see my mother who, with her infant son, had returned to her father's house. She received him with the calmness and dignity of a naturally refined and simple-minded woman; and my uncle, who was a man of the world, at once recognized these qualities in her, and though there was never much intercourse between them, he ever afterwards spoke with a perfect respect of his nephew's wife.

It was at that time that an arrangement was made by which little Humphrey was to remain with his mother till he should be nine years old, and then be sent to some school by his uncle, spending his holidays partly at Kensington, partly with his

mother. It was by her own choice that my mother remained henceforth in her own home.

"If your father had lived," she said one day to her son, years afterwards, "I should have been a different woman, I daresay. I was learning to enter into his thoughts and tastes, and he should never have had reason to be ashamed of his wife. But after his death it was different. I had to choose between struggling on amongst his fine relations, with no one to give me a helping hand, perhaps, or of coming back to your grandfather who missed me sorely, and to the work I had been used to all my life. I chose the last, as your education was provided for, my boy, and I think I did rightly, though I had to give up something I had got to care for."

"I think if I had been in the way of it when I was a child, I might have learnt as well as anyone, Humphrey," she said on another occasion, "but it was late to begin even when I married, and now—why, it would fidget your grandfather to death to see me with a book in my hand," she said with a smile, "and it would fidget me, too, to think that meanwhile everything was going to sixes and sevens, maybe. Besides, I feel drawn somehow towards the housework, and the dairy, and the animals. So

you must just put up with an ignorant old mother, my lad."

"Neither old nor ignorant, but the best and dearest of mothers," Humphrey said, stooping down and kissing her, "and I hate to see women always reading."

She looked up in his face with her kind, tender eyes. "Eh, my lad," she said, "there are fine things in books, and I should like well enough to know some of them. Your father used to read to me often, and I remember that when I was a girl, before I ever saw him, I thought there was nothing in the world like a story. I was glad enough in those days to get a chance of running away from the house-work, and hiding myself with a book. I found a number of them in a cupboard upstairs the other day; they belonged to your grandmother, but they seemed to me poor stuff when I looked into them again. I liked what your father read better, poetry and history, and such things."

So she would sometimes talk, and the lot, that to a commoner mind, might have appeared insupportable by contrast with the more ideal one that had once been hers, she accepted with a perfect simplicity, too calm and unwavering to be termed resignation. As for her son, he cannot be sufficiently grateful for the wisdom which, satisfied that

his future was secure, at once laid aside all paltry ambitions, and allowed him to spend his first years in the large freedom of the bounteous country life.

Mr. Randolph never came again after that first visit, nor took any further notice of his little kinsman, till that April morning when, as I have said, his letter called Humphrey away from the river-side to prepare for his journey to Kensington. But the boy's mother, who was anxious that her son should know as much as possible of his father's relations, often spoke of them to him, and of the time when he should be old enough to go and see them. Humphrey liked nothing better than these stories; in his imagination, this far-off uncle, who was a gentleman, as his own father had been, formed the happiest contrast to a present crabbed old grandfather, who, as he knew well enough, (though not through his mother), was no gentleman; and the thought of this unknown uncle filled the boy's mind with a vague expectation and hope, as he made his first venture into the world on the top of a London coach.

An old red brick house with a tall iron railing and paved court in front, a lovely old-fashioned garden overshadowed by fruit-trees behind, a stately muffled drawing-room which no one ever used, a pleasant oak-furnished library full of books and

scattered papers, where an energetic, imperious little man, with ambition working in his brain, and a life's disappointment, perhaps, in his heart, sat reading, writing, dictating letters—in after-years all these things were so familiar to Humphrey that he can hardly now separate his later memories from those first impressions he received when, a half-frightened, half-expectant little lad, he was set down at his uncle's door that April day. Perhaps to his inexperienced eyes, the difference between the old grandfather at home, and the little man with bristling white hair who looked him all over with a keen eye, and dismissed him with a nod, was hardly sufficient in degree to justify the wide space that his imagination had placed between them. Perhaps he was glad to be sent with such curt welcome from a presence that filled him with awe and disappointment—these things are but dim memories to him now. But he well remembers, as one of those keen childish experiences that never fade from the mind, the sudden sense of desertion and loneliness with which he found himself left in a strange room to spend, as he thought, a long afternoon by himself.

It was a much used, faded room, with long windows that opened on to the garden; but a storm of rain was falling and he could not go out. A

good-natured housemaid, pitying the little stray lad who stood staring with round eyes and an uncertain heart, took some pains to ascertain his tastes and to satisfy them as far as she could. She gave him some books, a pencil and paper, an old paint-box, and then left him. Humphrey was a child of resources, and did not mind being alone; but he was only a child, and he had never before been away from his home and his mother. He would not cry—he would have thought that undignified—but he felt very miserable, and I daresay there never was a more forlorn-looking little stranger than this one, who sat winking away his tears over his paper and pencil, when some one came running quickly in through the window from the garden, where a sudden gleam of sunshine was turning the lessening shower into a golden mist. It was a slim little maiden of twelve years, in a dim sea-blue frock and amber necklace, with loose brown hair falling upon her neck and shoulders, and in her skirt, which she held gathered up in front, a great heap of wet apple-blossom which all tumbled on to the floor as she saw Humphrey.

She came straight up to the boy, who had jumped off his chair as she came in, and now stood rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand that she might not see his tears.

"Are you Humphrey?" she said; "have you been here long? I was in the summer house at the end of the garden, and nobody told me you had come. Do you know who I am? I am your cousin, Ersilia de Florian."

Humphrey had heard before of his cousin Ersilia. His mother, some time after that reconciliation of which mention has been made, had gone, for the only time in her life, to stay for a few days at Mr. Randolph's house in Kensington; and she had often related to Humphrey how, on the first morning after her arrival (she feeling lonely enough, as he can guess now, in that great house with her half-unfriendly kindred) a knock had come at her bedroom door, and opening it, she had seen standing there a little round-cheeked, grey-eyed maiden of four years old, who put her soft little hand into my mother's with an air of tender patronage, and invited her down to the breakfast-room. Mamma was in bed with a bad headache, this kind little hostess said, but grandpapa would be down soon; and now, how should they amuse themselves? She brought out her doll; she proposed one game after another to wile away the time; she set to work in earnest to entertain her guest, and succeeded at any rate in winning her heart. This had been one of Humphrey's favourite stories, for which

he would ask again and again, and the little cousin with a strange foreign name had, doubtless, had her share in that vague wonder and expectation which, as I have said, had hung about this unknown world in which he now found himself.

Humphrey, however, had been discovering for the last half hour that life is full of illusions, and that there is much vanity in a world that one has peopled with expectations; nor am I certain that Ersilia, for the first few minutes, did much to relieve this sad sense of general discouragement. Humphrey did not think her very pretty. There was a little girl with whom he sometimes played at home, who had hitherto been his ideal of feminine beauty. She had a round, rosy face, and tight, shining, golden curls, and he thought that on the whole he preferred these to Ersilia's pale cheeks, and rough, brown hair that waved in short lengths at the top of her head, and fell in loose curls on her shoulders. But he liked his new companion's clear, grey eyes, her long, black, curved eyelashes, and he presently found himself speculating as to how those eyelashes would suit the greenish-blue eyes and pink and white face of his little friend at home. But these speculations did not last long, for before the day was over he had forgotten all about his old friend—with whom, indeed, he had had more

than one quarrel, and whom he had found more lovely than amiable—and thought that in all the world there was no one so dear and so beautiful as his cousin Ersilia.

The two children were friends directly. She was three years older than Humphrey, but scarcely less of a child, I fancy, than he was, though she had already that instinct of womanly thoughtfulness and tenderness, which, as we know, some women have from their cradles, whilst with others it is as a lost sense to the end of their lives. I think she saw Humphrey's tears, though the boy tried hard to hide them, and she set herself at once to cheer and amuse him; as once, years before, she had, all unprompted, devoted herself to the amusement of his mother.

"Do you like apple-blossom?" she said, picking up her boughs from the floor; "I am going to put these into water. If it were not so wet we would go into the garden and get some more."

She began putting them into a jar, whilst Humphrey watched her with wonder.

"Do you pick the apple-blossom?" he said at length. "I am never allowed to do that. We keep it for the apples in autumn."

Ersilia laughed. "I never thought about the apples," she said. "But I suppose we don't care

much about them here, for when they are ripe they all lie about on the grass where they fall. How nicely you draw," she added, coming up to where Humphrey sat at the table, and kneeling down at his side. "Can you paint, too?"

"Yes," said Humphrey, "I can paint very nicely." And indeed he thought he could. "I will paint your portrait if you like."

"Will you?" said Ersilia, somewhat impressed, perhaps, by the confident sense of power expressed in this prompt offer. "I should like that very much."

And Humphrey, who, in fact, used his pencil with more skill than is usual with children of nine years old, drew and painted what he was pleased to call a portrait of his cousin, in which the blue frock and amber necklace had a prominent place, one may be sure. Only the other day he came across this childish daub, which he gave to his mother when he went home, and which she carefully pasted, along with others of his early productions, at the end of one of his father's old sketch-books. Great heaven! with what a sudden, tender pang, the memory of that vanished day came back to him as he gazed. The meaningless lines, the crude colours faded away; he seemed to see again in dim, half-forgotten lines the sweet childish face,

the falling hair, the innocent eyes; he seemed to hear the fitful rain splashing upon the gravel walk, to see a little lad bending, all absorbed, over his work—

Mr. Randolph dined out, but Ersilia and Humphrey had tea together in that pleasant room looking out upon the old garden, where the birds were twittering, and the sun shone in golden gleams between the sudden storms of rain; and as Ersilia poured out the tea, and handed the bread-and-butter, she asked her cousin a hundred questions about his mother, and about his life on the old farm at home, imparting to him, in return for the details he gave her, some of her own history.

Madame de Florian had died, as Humphrey already knew, more than two years before. Nor did Ersilia once mention her mother, whose memory, I know, she cherished as a sacred thing apart till the end of her life. But she told Humphrey something of her history during these last two years, which she had spent partly with her grandfather at Kensington, and partly with her father's brother, Monsieur de Florian, who had large estates in the north of France, to which she had been more than once, but who lived chiefly in Paris or in Rome.

Her uncle was an old man, Ersilia said; he had no children, and his wife had died a long time ago,

but his sister-in-law, Mademoiselle de Brisac, occupied an apartment in his hotel in Paris.

"She is old, too," Ersilia added; "at least I think so. But her hair is not white like my uncle's; it is quite black, in tight little curls, and her cheeks are as red—as red as if they were painted."

"Perhaps they are," Humphrey suggested, quite innocently.

"Oh, no!" said Ersilia, with some indignation; "she would never think of doing such a thing. Why, it is very wrong, you know, to paint. She is very good-natured and kind to me; she says she will introduce me into society some day when I come out of the convent. Did you know that I am going away to-morrow to a convent in Paris? My uncle De Florian says that to be *bien élevé*, one should go to school in a convent; and so grandpapa says that I can go too, as there is no one here to teach me. I am glad of that; I want to learn a great deal, and know about everything. I have had two governesses, but grandpapa did not like them, so they went away again."

So they talked to each other, whilst the daylight faded and the fire seemed to brighten in the grey twilight, filling the room with fantastic lights and shadows, such as children love. Presently Ersilia went to the piano and played a little stum-

bling tune in the dusk, that Humphrey, who was quite tired of sitting still, might jump up and down to the queer little shadows that jumped back to him on the opposite wall. Then, coming back to the fire, the two children sat down together on the rug in front of it, and told each other stories, in which Humphrey, for his part, inspired by the moment, slew more than one dragon whilst engaged in rescuing the beautiful princesses whom he always named Ersilia.

What dragons, indeed, had already crossed the path of the little lonely girl, I wonder? I think she cannot have led a very happy life after her mother's death, alone with her governesses and her grandfather, who, as Humphrey well knew in after-years, was apt to be like a whirlwind tearing and storming through the house. Servants, children, all went flying at the prompt bidding of the fierce little man, who was a regular tyrant in his own household. That very afternoon he had called Ersilia away from the portrait sitting, and she had come back very pale and silent for a minute or two, though she soon began to laugh and talk as before, and said nothing of what had passed between herself and her grandfather. I have sometimes thought that the years of childhood are, as it were, a prophecy of all our after-life, the little stage on which

with puny passions, we all unconsciously rehearse the scenes that are to make the joys and tragedies of the years to come. I know not how that may be; but I do know that it was not in vain that to Ersilia, child and woman, was given the bravest and most silent-enduring heart I ever knew.

Humphrey, tired out by his journey and his day's excitement, fell asleep in the midst of one of his stories, and only woke to find himself being carried off to bed by the friendly housemaid. But when Ersilia, half an hour later, came, as she had promised, to wish him good-night, she found in the dim white twilight with which an uncertain moon filled the room, a little figure, wide-awake, sitting up in bed in his night-shirt. The little lad was full of woe again. He was used to say his prayers to his mother every night, and the ceremony was too intimately connected in his mind with repeating them aloud at her knee for him to go through it alone, but he was oppressed by a horrible sense of guilt in leaving it undone.

"I want my mother," the boy cried, with a choking sob that he could not keep down.

"I will hear your prayers," Ersilia said, on learning this cause of grief. I do not know what thoughts passed through the mind of the little motherless girl, whose mother would always be want-

ing to her now, but she sat down on the bed, and taking Humphrey's two hands into hers, put her arm round him as he knelt beside her. He laid his head on her shoulder and so repeated his evening prayer. He remembers yet the soft pressure of the little hand that clasped his own, the earnest eyes that looked down into his in the dim light, the clear childish voice that helped his faltering words.

After she had tucked him into bed again, and given him his good-night kiss, she turned back as she was leaving the room and gave him one kiss more. "I wish you were my little brother, Humphrey," she said, wistfully. "I should like to have a little brother like you to love me always."

The next day she went away to her Paris convent, and it seemed to Humphrey that a sudden loneliness and darkness fell upon the great house, so that he was glad to get home again to his mother.

He never forgot his cousin Ersilia, though he saw her no more in the years that followed. But he often thought of that fair little playmate of one April day, and no succeeding impressions came to confuse the distinctness of that first memory. Four years later, he being then a Rugby school-boy, a somewhat dreamy, uncongenial lad, I take it, he

heard that his cousin was married to Prince Zaraikine, a Russian nobleman of rank, many years older than herself. After that, a sort of mystery fell upon her life. The marriage had not been a happy one, he was told in vague phrases; she was living with her uncle at Rome; little was known of her husband. It was not till five or six years later when Humphrey was studying painting in Paris, that he heard something more definite of her story—that her husband had deserted her within six months of her marriage, that later on he had become involved in some Polish conspiracy, had been killed the previous year in attempting to escape from Russia, and that the Princess Zaraikine, famed for her beauty, her talents, her accomplishments, was still living at Rome with her uncle, Monsieur de Florian, and his sister-in-law Mademoiselle Mathilde de Brisac.

CHAPTER III.

Digressive.

THERE exists, as I have already intimated, a half-finished portrait of the Princess Zaraikine. It was painted in the last months of the year that we were at the Eaux Bonnes, but only the head is fin-

ished, the remainder being merely sketched in; the hand that began it was arrested half way in its progress, but it is the master-piece of him who wrought it, and I think the very vagueness of the accessories give more life and vigour to the clear and perfect face that looks out from a shadowy background.

There are certain portraits which, as we look at them, suggest even more than they express, in which the one unvarying expression on the canvas is but the key, as it were, to a world of varying emotions, in which a whole living soul seems still to look forth from eyes pathetic with memories that are secrets for ever now. Just so, we say, that man must have loved and hated, fought and conquered; just so, that woman must have smiled and wept, and scorned, and met her lover's eyes. Something of all this he feels who, looking now at the portrait of the Princess Zaraikine, sees her again in the glow of her youth and beauty. He sees a face of purest outline and colouring, instinct with life, with sentiment, with imagination, overshadowed by something of dim wonder, of doubtful questioning in the line of the brow, in the curve of the parting lips, yet with a smile on these and in her eyes that belonged to that year of her life alone. Those eyes could brighten with sudden anger, could

weep tears of compassion or love, but never tears of weakness and feeble self-pity; and yet there was in them at times I know not what expression of wistful appeal, as of a child who suffers pain and bears it bravely, yet wonders why it should have been so hurt. It was an expression that Ersilia must have gained, I think, in early youth, and that never quite left her in all the years that came after.

What strange trouble indeed, what to her quite incomprehensible pain must not that have been that she endured in the first years of her girlhood? To Humphrey she never spoke of that early time, but something he heard of it from others and something he can imagine from what he himself knew of her character. She was but a child when she married, a child of sixteen, with features that had that greatest charm of early youth, a sweet promise for after years, but with little positive beauty, I have been told, beyond her abundant hair and lovely eyes. I can fancy with what confiding innocence, with what guileless simplicity those eyes must have looked out on the new world opening before her, with what child-like reverence for everything wiser, and older, and nobler than herself she must have laid her hand in her husband's—something too one can imagine of the rude shock she must have felt

when not six months later she found herself deserted, alone in the world, left to her fate in a foreign city.

"My married life seems to me like a dream," she once said, not to Randolph, but to another, "like one of those dreams that haunt one throughout the day, and colour everything with their own sentiment—only mine has haunted all the succeeding years of my life. As I look back upon my husband now, I see that he must have been a man of great and varied talents; he had travelled a great deal, he spoke many languages with a Russian's fluency, he had read everything, and seemed to know almost as much as he had read. I can judge him apart from myself in these days, and knowing something of the world, his conduct appears to me less bewildering than it did at the time, when I could only judge with a girl's inexperience of the proportions of life. I can now imagine him to have been urged, by motives which could not have occurred to me then, into a marriage repugnant to him with a little girl whom he abandoned without remorse when he found her in his way. To me in those days he appeared transcendently clever and noble, and, if he would have let me, I should have learned to love him. In his eyes I can only have appeared a child without beauty or talents, too shy

almost to speak to a man whom she held in so much reverence."

Ersilia, then, this poor, shy, guileless little one, found herself abandoned suddenly in a strange foreign city, where she spent some days of, who shall say what hopeless bewilderment, before her uncle, to whom she at once appealed in her distress, could come to fetch her to his own home. In the days when Randolph used to question Mademoiselle Mathilde upon every detail she could remember of his cousin Ersilia's life, she related to him more than once, and very graphically, the history of the journey to Vienna which she made in the company of Monsieur de Florian when he went to fetch his niece.

Her brother-in-law insisted on her accompanying him, she said, though she had no liking for such long journeys. They travelled day and night till they reached Vienna, and she remembered their arrival there as if it had been yesterday. Ersilia was staying at a big hotel, and Monsieur de Florian and his sister were shown up into a large gloomy salon, with black furniture and a deep old-fashioned window, looking out upon a damp garden full of trees, all dripping with the rain of a pouring day—she remembered it all perfectly, Mademoiselle Mathilde said, it looked so gloomy and *triste* for a

young thing like that; even she who was old, liked bright colours and sunshine. There was a door open into a bed-room where the Princess Zaraikine's maid was packing her mistress's trunks, but in the salon there was no one but the poor little Princess herself, who was sitting all alone and forlorn on the window-seat, with an open book on her lap, and the wind driving the wet branches of the trees in at the open window, and blowing about her loose hair falling on her shoulders as she still wore it in those days. She jumped up, however, at the sound of footsteps and voices, and came running to embrace her uncle. He began to cry a little ("he had a soft heart, my brother-in-law, and could cry a little for anything," Mademoiselle Mathilde said *en parenthèse*), but Ersilia did not cry at all. She took hold of his two hands and kissed him, and then, still holding his hands, turned and embraced Mademoiselle Mathilde also. She was very pale, and had a sort of bewildered look in her eyes, but she was quite calm.

"I would have come to you, and saved you the journey, uncle," she said, "I had written to tell you so, but then I found that I—I had not money enough; and then your letter came, and I knew you would have already started."

"The damned scoundrel!" cried Monsieur de

Florian. He dropped Ersilia's hands, and began walking up and down the room; she stood still by the table, her hands resting on it. Presently she said,

"Have you heard from Prince Zaraikine, uncle? Do you know why he left me? Had I done anything wrong, or vexed him in any way?"

"He left you because he is a black-hearted villain," cried Monsieur de Florian; "but you shall never see him again, Ersilia, you shall come and live with me, my child."

She did not answer for a minute, but went to the window again and stood leaning against it, looking out. At last she turned round, and going up to her uncle, put her arms round his neck.

"I will go home with you, uncle," she said, "it will be best so," "and what more was said, or how he explained matters to her, I do not know," said Mademoiselle Mathilde, "for I went into the next room to take off my bonnet, and speak to the maid; but we all set off for Paris the next day."

The Princess Zaraikine then lived henceforth with her uncle, a kind, soft-hearted, refined old man, and his wife's sister, Mademoiselle de Brisac. I do not know that she ever came to England, or saw her grandfather again. Mr. Randolph had never professed much affection for this little woman-

grandchild, who could do nothing for the honour of his family, and did not even bear his name. He did not interfere in her marriage, but assented to everything Monsieur de Florian proposed. His hopes in those days were fixed in another direction; and it was not till those hopes had come to an end, and then, only in his will, that he recognized his grand-daughter's claims upon him. But her uncle loved her dearly; I have heard Ersilia say that nothing could exceed the indulgence and loving kindness of the old man, urged thereto partly, perhaps, by a sense of remorse at the disastrous conclusion of the marriage he had promoted; and the girl clung to him, no doubt, as the one prop left in a world that had become such an exceptional one to her—how exceptional one can imagine, thinking of the day when the consciousness of beauty must have dawned upon her, when she must have recognized that to her no charm or grace of womanhood had been denied—and to what end? To find herself a wife without a wife's privileges, robbed of her freedom, cut off from the sweet impulses and illusions of girlhood, bound at the very opening of life to a man who had scorned her and cast her on one side.

How Ersilia met these sore revelations that faced her on the threshold of womanhood, it does

not concern Randolph to relate here. At much, indeed, he can but dimly guess; Mademoiselle Mathilde, his informant on many points, could have given him little information on this. From her, however, he learned in after-years such details of the Princess Zaraikine's early life as he has given above; although months before he first met the old lady in the Pyrenees, he had, as I have said already, heard the history of his cousin's marriage in brief outline. He was at that time in Paris studying painting under Mr. Fleming, than whom no lad ever had a kinder or more friendly protector; and this part of Randolph's own life is one that cannot be passed over altogether in silence.

I have said that Mr. Fleming knew and loved my father well. It was in Rome that they had met, during my father's brief married life, and Arthur Fleming, an art student in those days, some eight or ten years younger than my father, had received from him certain kindnesses which he repaid by the enthusiastic admiration that lads of a generous and imaginative temperament often conceive for men older than themselves. When my father died, and his wife was left alone with her infant son, it was Fleming who was most forward in helping her, who arranged for her departure from Rome, who, as far as possible, took all

trouble off her hands. He never forgot this early friendship. He wrote occasionally to my mother, and though he himself rarely came to England, he sent the little lad, her son, more than one kind token and remembrance; and when, years after, that little lad, grown into a tall stripling, declared his determination to be a painter and nothing else, it was to her husband's old friend that my mother naturally turned for counsel. Mr. Fleming first gave her much advice as to the direction of the boy's studies, and presently, when these were somewhat advanced, offered, if his mother would consent to his coming to Paris, to receive him there as his own pupil. The carrying out of this kindly plan was delayed for a time by the death of Humphrey's mother, and it was while the lad was still mourning her loss (for he had loved her passionately, and the narrow walls of home had still enclosed a large part of his world) that he came to Paris, and was received by Arthur Fleming with open arms.

It was not, one may be sure, without strong opposition on the part of his uncle that Humphrey made and stood by his resolution to become an artist; but he belonged to a new generation, on whom prejudices of a certain class sit more lightly, perhaps, than on our forefathers, and Mr. Randolph

found this younger nephew more impracticable than his father had been before him. The boy had loved drawing long before he could understand what such a love meant; as a mere child he had never been happier than with a pencil in his hand, and in long winter evenings he had found no employment so delightful as that of copying his father's old sketches, which in those days he looked upon as some of the finest works of art in the world. The half undefined artistic tastes that for years had kept my father hovering between his uncle's favour and the forbidden world of art, took a stronger and more passionate form in Humphrey, inspired as he was by the beliefs that, still uncertain in the father, had become strong and guiding traditions to the son. It was not without a certain exultation that, remembering that father's history, Humphrey resisted his uncle's first attempts at coercion and replied to Mr. Randolph's threats of disinheriting him (for the boy, like his father, had been brought up as his uncle's half-acknowledged heir) by resigning all pretensions to his favour. He acted from an irresistible impulse which he felt to be right, which left no room for repentance; and yet there was a pathos, which he can feel now, in the bitter silence with which the old man met this rebellion on the part of the lad on whom, for the

second time, he had set all his hopes. Mr. Randolph said no further words in expostulation, but he henceforth ignored his nephew's existence; and when he died, shortly before Humphrey went to Paris, it was found that by his will the family estates passed to a distant cousin, whilst all his money and personal property, together with his house in Kensington, were bequeathed to his granddaughter, the Princess Zaraikine.

Humphrey's mother, very likely, lamented this change in her boy's prospects more than Humphrey himself, who was not of an age to care much about money, and to whom the possession of a large estate would have been an intolerable burden, which he has all his life been thankful to have escaped. For the rest, his old grandfather dying about the same time enabled Humphrey to carry on his studies with sufficient ease. The old man had been a regular miser, and though his rheumatic lameness, which prevented his going about the house had enabled my mother to carry out her own ideas of housekeeping, his habits have caused her many and many an hour of uneasiness, I know.

"Well, lad, well, and what have you got in your pockets to-day?" he would ask Humphrey on his return from one of his visits to Kensington,

and if, as sometimes happened, for Mr. Randolph was always liberal with his money, the boy pulled out a handful of sovereigns, the old fellow would stretch out a trembling hand to take them.

"Best let me have 'em, lad; best let me have 'em," he would say, "I'll take care of them for you; they'll grow none the less in my hands, and you'll be all the richer for it some day."

On his return from that first visit to his uncle's, little Humphrey half-frightened, half seduced by these promises, parted with his fine new gold sovereign, and then went away feeling very blank at the loss of his treasure. An hour afterwards, however, his mother brought it back to him.

"Here is your sovereign, Humphrey," she said, "grandfather does not really want it, and I had rather you spent it yourself, my lad, on something useful. You can buy that new paint box you were talking of the other day."

The very last time Humphrey saw his grandfather, the old man, then lying on his death-bed, asked the old question.

"I have no money, grandfather," Humphrey answered, looking rather sadly at his mother, who, with a large Bible before her, was seated at the bedside.

"Ay, 'ay, you've spent it all, I reckon," said the

old man, with his wandering hands and eyes, "you've always been over free with your money, Humphrey. You should read your Bible like your mother, lad; yes, you may read another chapter, if you like, Sylvie," this to my mother, "I've learnt a deal out of the Bible, I have, none can say I was not a scholar and knew my catechism, and went to church regular in my day. I liked fine to hear the parson read out about the talents of silver and the pearl of great price that the trader sold all to possess. Eh, it must have been a fine pearl yon, but I'm not sure that he did the wisest thing with his savings. 'Twere like burying them in the ground, as the other man did. They give no interest, don't pearls. A snug loan here and there at a sure six per cent. that you can call in when you please, suits my book better. Mark my words, Humphrey, you're over free with your money, my lad."

"Eh, father, it's sad to hear you talk like that," my mother said gently, "it's of heavenly riches the Bible speaks; there's nothing about earthly gain in it."

"Ay, ay, like enough, I'm not saying there's nought about heavenly riches. There's a deal about most things in the Bible; there's weddings for the lasses, and fighting enough for the lads."

But there's a deal about money and trading too, and as far as I can see 'tis all on the side of them as is thrifty, and knows how to turn an honest penny. No man can say I've read my Bible for nought. Let's have another chapter, lass."

And so the old fellow passed away from his account books and money bags, in which, as I have said, a sufficient sum of money was found to enable Humphrey to continue the studies to which his grandfather, had he been alive, would never have contributed a penny.

It was in the early winter, rather more than a year after his grandfather's death, that Humphrey came to Paris. He was an enthusiastic, impressionable lad in those days, ready to mould himself to the first aspect of life that should appeal to his sympathies, and he adapted himself without difficulty to the ways of his master, for whom he quickly conceived an immense love and admiration. He found him leading a somewhat lonely life of perfect simplicity, inhabiting two or three rooms in the Rue de Clichy, and living in the society of his pictures, his books, and one or two friends of his own standing. It was a solitude into which he had drifted as one could imagine, rather than one which he had deliberately chosen, a loneliness from which he suffered without the power of

escaping from it, for he had neither the instincts nor the habits of a sociable man. He was too courteous and sympathetic by nature to be eccentric, but he had in him the elements of eccentricity—a hatred of the conventionalities of society, a keen and humorous feeling for their absurdities, and a melancholy which at once made itself felt in intercourse with him. It was a melancholy partly constitutional, the result of a sensitive temperament too keenly alive for joy, to the mystery of life for ever overshadowed by the darkness of change and death, and partly engendered by his life and by his work, which, when Randolph first knew him was the one absorbing interest of that life. Humphrey, of course, looked upon his master as one of the greatest painters that ever lived, and judging his pictures with a clearer judgment in these days, he still thinks he was not far wrong; for, with a profound knowledge of his art, he had also more than any man I ever knew, the gift of poetic insight and selection—a genius altogether rare, original, and within its own limits, perfect, with an indescribable charm that, like the evening sunlight, transfigured and idealized every object that it touched. No one ever formed a truer estimate of his own powers than Mr. Fleming, but no one was ever less reconciled to the impossibility of over-stepping these

limits of his own genius. "I will do all that other men have done, and more," we say at the opening of life. "I am but one among many, and can do only that which it is given me to do," is what most of us have to acknowledge before its close. Mr. Fleming had learned this wisdom like another, but it was with a melancholy resignation, which coloured all his life, that he accepted these invisible barriers set round men by fate. It was a disposition that in a less generous-tempered man might have led to a restless self-assertion, an unjust disparagement of the merits of others; in him it produced a large appreciation of the powers he did not himself possess, a wise toleration of even the follies of other men, from whom he thought he might learn something.

"I rather like to hear these young fellows talk," he said to a friend, one day, after listening patiently for an hour to the rodomontade of a young Frenchman. "After all they keep the world alive, and may do good work some day, if they will take the trouble to learn. That young fellow, now, who has just gone out——"

"He is a conceited ass and an intolerable bore," interrupted Randolph, who happened to be present.

"So he is, Humphrey; and I don't expect you to be tolerant of him, my boy. You are much too full of a good opinion of yourself to stand other people's conceit just yet. Well, that young fellow has brains, do you know, though not nearly so many as he fancies. He won't improve upon Michael Angelo, I take it, as he suggested doing, just now; but he may do some very good work in his own way, when he has found out what he can't do. And I am not sure that he was not right upon one or two points; he said one or two things worth remembering—"

Humphrey was Mr. Fleming's only pupil, nor, in the early days after his arrival in Paris, did the lad care to make any other friends. He came saddened from his mother's death-bed, where he had sat day after day during her short illness, and he still felt her loss to be an overwhelming grief. A hundred times they had talked together of this journey to Paris; of his future life; of all that he was to do, and to be. He was to have written to her; to have painted his first picture of her; she was to have shared in all his triumphs; she would have sympathized in all his failures. The love between the mother and son had been very great; and I think that it was when Mr. Fleming, discovering this, and the cause of his pupil's fits of

moody depression, cheered and encouraged him with a kindness and sympathy than which no woman's could have been tenderer, that Humphrey began to give his master that love and reverence which in the midst of all the waywardness and wilful alienation of after-days he never quite lost. He still looks back with gratitude on that unfailing helpfulness and affection, whilst it pleases him to think that the simplicity of Mr. Fleming's tastes and habits, his noble aims, and single-minded devotion to his work, have not been without their influence on his own life in all the years that have come since.

It was during this winter that Humphrey heard from an English artist, lately come from Rome, something of the story of his cousin Ersilia's life. Everyone knew the Princess Zاراикіne by reputation, his informant said; no lady in Rome had so fair a fame for beauty and accomplishments, and no words could express the admiration and sympathy with which she was regarded. But she was known to few personally, for she lived a life of great seclusion, rarely going into society, and then only amongst her uncle's most intimate friends. Occasionally, she would appear at one of his receptions, sometimes she would visit a studio in his company, and when her mother-in-law, the old

Princess Zaraikine was alive, she had constantly appeared at her parties, but that was some two or three years ago now.

“Did you not know that there had been a Dowager Princess?” the artist said; “she was a great invalid, but a very charming and distinguished woman, and she and her daughter-in-law were devoted to each other. She cast the entire blame of the separation that took place so soon after his marriage on her son, as, indeed, who would not? Everyone but his mother perhaps, and that well-meaning old fool, M. de Florian, who thought he had got a fine match for his niece when he married her straight out of her convent to a man nearly three times her age, knew that the Prince was madly in love with a Polish Countess, who was already provided with a husband, and that he only married your cousin for her money. Having got what he wanted, he left her, and followed his Countess to Naples, to Berlin, to Paris, to Heaven knows where. The thing was notorious. It was she, they say, who dragged him into that Polish conspiracy, in which she was engaged heart and soul. It is hard to believe of a Russian, but there is nothing impossible, I suppose, when a woman is in the case. He paid for it at any rate, when he was shot or drowned—nobody knows exactly what happened—in making

his escape. But is it possible you never heard the story before?"

"Never," said Humphrey. "I have heard nothing of my cousin for years, and I have not seen her since I was nine years old. Do you know M. de Florian?"

The Englishman laughed. "Who does not know M. de Florian?" he said. "He is the best known man in Rome. He has receptions every Tuesday evening to which everyone goes. He haunts the studios, he talks art, he passes judgment on our pictures. He is not a bad judge either, the old fellow; I speak of him with respect, he bought two of my pictures only the other day. He is always buying something. During the summer he travels in Germany or Holland, and hunts for bric-à-brac; or he goes to Greece and digs up old coins and helmets. His house is crammed with these things, and they are worth looking at, too, for he knows what he is about, and understands buying china better than marrying his niece. He is a good-natured, pottering old fellow, and we all like him, though we laugh at him too, a little."

Only a few days afterwards, this same artist came to tell Humphrey that he had received a letter from Rome, informing him of the death of M. de Florian. "He will buy no more of my pictures,"

the young man said, "I have lost a patron—but let that pass. I am sorry for your cousin, Randolph; she will miss her uncle, for they were very fond of each other. She travelled with him everywhere, and one for ever met them riding or driving together. Now she has no one left but that painted old heathen, Mademoiselle de Brisac, who used to scowl at us from under her wig at M. de Florian's receptions. She hated the English, and always took care to let us know it."

Six months later, Humphrey, gone to the Pyrenees for a summer holiday, read in the visitor's book of the hotel at which he was staying the names of Mademoiselle de Brisac, and the Princess Zaraikine. It was with no small curiosity and excitement that the lad found that he should see his cousin again, that unknown lady, the praise of whose beauty had reached his ears—that little playmate of an April day that fell ten years ago.

CHAPTER IV.

A Boy's Paradise.

SOMETHING of sadness comes over the writer of these pages as he approaches this portion of his task. The night has fallen whilst he has been writing, the fire-light glances upon his page, over the roofs of the opposite houses the stars shine in the wintry sky. The sound of the life of the great city comes to him monotonously in rolling carriages, in passing footsteps, in the confused, inarticulate murmur of a million voices, that for ever rise and fall; nearer at hand, two little feet patter along the passage, one little voice chirps and twitters, and is suddenly hushed behind a banging door. That little voice is very sweet in the father's ear, although he foresees that it also will pass away from him willingly in the years to come. Already he fancies it chirps more blithely to others than to him, and a spirit that is not his, looks out like a haunting memory, a perpetual prophecy, through his child's pretty blue eyes. "Your world is not my world," it seems to say, "let me go." Well, he will let her go.—Something of sadness, I say, comes over him. He is a silent, lonely, already grey-haired man in

these days; the best of life perhaps is passing from him now; such fame, or praise, or blame as it had in store for him, he has tasted, not caring greatly, it may be, for any of these things, indifferent, perhaps, to a praise without discrimination, to a censure that he never shunned, to a success that came to him at a time when he cared little for it. He knows what his work is, and does it with the best power that is in him; but he has measured the height of its possibilities, the splendour of its perfection, against his own proved powers of performance, and he knows that he has accomplished this, and no more. Whatever the value of his work may be—and, indeed, he holds it not quite valueless—still, it is only this and no more.

But he has to write of a time when the hopes of life were inspiring as wine, when the failures of other men filled him a wondering impatience at a pitiful experience in which he could never have a share, when to know meant to do, to perceive, to accomplish. That time did not last long, those days were not many in number; disappointments and defeats came to him as to others; in the path where most men trip, he, too, stumbled and fell. But it is with a sort of affection, of regretful tenderness that he still thinks of the lad to whom all things seemed more possible than shortcomings and

failures, before whom life lay spread out as a fair land whose dim, far-off horizon was hidden by the white blossoming trees of promise. The fruit is ripening now and he plucks it, not without delight in his accomplished work; but the morning red has faded from the sky, and through the thinning branches he seems to see the horizon narrowing day by day.

It was such a lad as this then, full of such confident hopes, of such pleasant illusions, who once again met his cousin Ersilia at the Pyrenean village of the Eaux-Bonnes. The greeting between the two was simple almost as it had been when they met as children ten years before. Some echo, perhaps, of that childish sentiment still vibrating through all these years, at once gave the tone to their future intercourse, which, on the Princess Zaraikine's part, was always one of perfect frankness and simplicity. And if Randolph, on his side, presently began to cherish that passion of devotion and adoration which characterises a boy's first love, he said not a word of it in those days we may be sure, feeling instinctively, no doubt, that any such words might at once end the sweet and frank companionship which had for him, in its commencement at any rate, a quite inexpressible charm.

Nor to Ersilia herself, I think, can that charm

have been altogether wanting. In the somewhat colourless medium in which the flower of her young life had slowly expanded, there can have been little place for anything young, ardent, and hopeful. A lonely child, a lonelier woman, her sympathies had been claimed by the kindly whims, the growing infirmities of her uncle, by the lingering illness of the Princess Zaraikine, her mother-in-law, by the varying caprices of Mademoiselle Mathilde. Her intellectual sympathies had had a wider scope, indeed, under the tuition of Monsieur de Florian, a man of no ordinary cultivation and refinement; but they had lain chiefly with the unknown living, the mighty dead, whose books she had read, whose works she had studied in half the churches and picture galleries of Europe. And with whatever pure enthusiasm she claimed her share in this heritage of ages, recognising that she also was one of those for whom the past has wrought, to whom the past appeals to justify its work, there must yet have come, as it were, pauses when, amidst the budding trees, perhaps, the calling birds, the opening flowers, books, and poems, and pictures must for a moment have seemed like last years' leaves strewn upon the path in the sudden imperative craving of a young living soul for its own part in the present beauty and fulness of life.

When Humphrey first met her in the Pyrenees it was already nearly a twelvemonth since the news of her husband's death had restored to her the freedom of which he had deprived her more than five years before; but since then her uncle's death, her departure from Rome, the breaking up of old ties and associations, had filled her life with fresh sadness. A profound melancholy still seemed to overshadow and influence her whole being, and I can imagine now (for in those days I thought of none of those things, nor cared to analyse a subtle charm) that she may have found no little pleasure in this new experience of some one belonging to her, youthful, eager, enthusiastic, and full of a thousand unproved hopes, and plans, and aspirations.

The Princess Zaraikine then, who knew no one at the Eaux-Bonnes, whither she had come on Mademoiselle Mathilde's account, had always a kindly welcome for her cousin, and after their first meeting there were few days on which Humphrey did not find his way to the *salon* she occupied in the Hôtel de ——. He remembers still the aspect of the dim, silent room, where closed Venetian blinds made a welcome shade and coolness, the open piano, the clock ticking and striking the hours with an echoing ting, Mademoiselle Mathilde nodding drowsily to him from her arm-chair, Ersilia looking up with a

smile to greet him. All through the hot hours of the afternoon he would sit drawing at the little table set in the window, whilst Ersilia, who at his entrance would lay aside her book or writing, sat opposite to him on the sofa at her embroidery frame. She worked very beautifully, and had learned from her mother-in-law, the Princess Zاراикіne, some almost lost art of Oriental embroidery which the elder lady had acquired in her youth in a Russian convent.

"I used not to care about work," Ersilia said one day in answer to some remark of Humphrey's, "and there are things now that I prefer doing. But at one time I was in the habit of spending many hours every day with my mother-in-law, who had a great love for fine and beautiful needlework, and I learned to care about it first for her sake and then for its own. I like to see the pattern growing and spreading over the empty cloth. I feel towards my working materials," she said with a smile, "much as a sculptor does towards his block of marble. I know that future leaves and flowers lie hidden in that heap of coloured silks, and I like to see them shaping themselves by degrees. That seems to you a trivial kind of creation, Humphrey, but it is the only one of which I am capable."

"I don't know why you should say that," said

Humphrey, "I should think you could do anything, and your work is almost as beautiful as a picture. You ought to be an artist—why not? Women have been painters, sculptors, poets before now."

A look, a flash passed over her face and was gone. "Not this woman," she said, and then sat silent for a while, her cheek resting on her hand. "I think I am no genius, Humphrey," she said at last, smiling a little, "I cannot paint pictures, nor compose music, nor even write verses, and that augurs ill for a future Corinne, you will allow."

"But that is merely a question of expression," Humphrey answered, "and if one has the feeling, the spirit—as you have, I know. I can hear it in your music when you are playing, and at other times—I have seen your face change—"

"Yes," she said, resuming her work, "there are certain things that affect me, that always have affected me strangely, but it is a spirit of dumbness not of prophecy, that comes over me. With you, Humphrey, it is different. What you feel you can express, and often in looking at your drawings I find that they interpret to me clearly my own dim thoughts; they reveal to me ideas of which I had no perception before. I think you have great genius. I look forward to your being a great man some day."

So she said with a simple earnestness, an exquisite kindness that shone in her eyes and made itself felt in her voice as she spoke; never had surely had a sweeter inspiration. And Humphrey, who in those days was indefatigable at his work, was seldom without some new sketch that he was eager to show and to explain to this kind and sympathetic listener, who had that gift of rarest fascination to a young artist whose powers of expression are still subordinate to his powers of imagination—the gift of a woman's ready and subtle comprehension of subtle meanings and ideas. If, as she herself affirmed, she had no creative genius, she had yet one of the finest and clearest intellects I ever knew, and that sympathetic appreciation of the creations of others, that informs them with new meanings, and is itself, so nearly allied to genius that it can bear no other name.

Do I exaggerate? I do not know. I know only that Ersilia seemed to me then, as she seems to me in my recollection of her now, unlike any other woman in the world. In all that she said and did there was a sweet and womanly friendliness, an unselfish cheerfulness, that no grief or trials could ever quite quench, and which gave a new charm to every word and action. I think she was naturally silent, but she constantly aroused

herself to talk, as one accustomed to be much with old and sick people to whom cheerful trivial histories are welcome as field-flowers to one imprisoned—tokens from a life no longer shared. Often when she and Randolph returned from one of the mountain walks they presently began to take together, she would sit down by Mademoiselle Mathilde, and recalling a hundred incidents unnoticed by Humphrey, would weave them into a long and pleasant tale to enliven the old lady. In manner she was at once frank and reserved, open and reticent. She had but few friends, and I think would never have cared to have many, for she made few demands on the love and sympathy of others. Hers was a sweet and cheerful, yet lonely spirit, so it seemed to Randolph, that had long since learned to live its own life apart.

It was in the afternoon and evening that Humphrey spent those hours with the Princess Zaraikine which soon appeared to the boy like hours of Paradise suddenly let down into the midst of the common world. In the morning she was generally engaged with Mademoiselle Mathilde, who was going through a course of baths and water-drinking; but in the afternoon Ersilia was at liberty and sometimes alone. A band played every day on the public Place, and Mademoiselle Mathilde

who liked of all things to be amused, and was constantly complaining of the dulness of the Eaux Bonnes, used to declare that the only thing that kept her alive at all, was sitting under the trees and watching the people who came to hear the music.

"Are you coming to the band this afternoon, Ersilia?" she would say, "I am going out immediately. I have just seen the best-dressed woman in the Eaux Bonnes pass up the road, and I must positively find out how her gown is made. She will probably be at the band, but if I do not go at once I may probably miss her altogether. In a place like this, people are here to-day and gone to-morrow. There is nothing more tiresome; one can count upon nothing. Are you coming, Ersilia?"

"Would you like me to accompany you, Aunt Mathilde? I don't think I care about it otherwise," Ersilia answered in her sweet cordial tones, which had in them at times the ring of acquired cheerfulness that always gives a touch of pathos to a young voice, the cheerfulness that comes from the giving, not the receiving of the brightness of life.

"Not at all, my dear child; on the contrary I much prefer being alone. I know there is nothing that you hate so much, and it distracts me to the

last degree to see you sitting beside me looking bored to death. But I thought I would ask you to-day, in case you might like to come. Eh, one must amuse oneself a little in this world; one grows rusty soon enough without sitting moping at home all day."

Mademoiselle Mathilde put this same question, and made this same kind of answer every day, not because she desired Ersilia's company, for as she truly said, she preferred to be by herself; but because, though shrewd and kindly enough in some ways, she was through a certain obtuseness of perception in the matter of the sentiments of others, one of those people upon whom any amount of iteration fails to make more impression than the proverbial drop of water on a duck's back. So at least Humphrey thought at that time, as day after day he heard her deliver these speeches and then go bustling away quite contentedly, whilst Ersilia would sit looking a little pale, a little weary, a look that came readily to her face in those days, as Randolph remembers now. But perhaps he did Mademoiselle Mathilde an injustice; he thinks now that there may have been a kindly intention in her old heart, and she was not so insensible as she appeared to be to Ersilia's sensitive dislike to general society, a dislike which had its origin pro-

bably in emotions not difficult to guess at, and which was perhaps the one morbid point in her character.

“Ersilia was always over-sensitive to my mind,” Mademoiselle Mathilde once said years afterwards, talking to Randolph of these long past days, “when we were in Rome I used constantly to urge her to go more into society; it was so bad for a young thing like that to have none of the gaiety and amusements of her age. But I never could persuade her—she lived the life of a nun, as I used to say. I believe it was partly that she had a dread of being talked about—of course she was talked about; no young woman separated from her husband could expect it to be otherwise, especially a girl like Ersilia who, married or unmarried, might have had all Rome at her feet if she had liked. Eh, we are all flesh and blood together, and it is give and take all the world over. I have heard plenty of scandal in my day, and talked it too for that matter; why not? we none of us can live under a bushel, and my poor Ersilia was no worse off than another. I said as much to her one day to console her. ‘My dear child,’ I said, ‘why should you mind what people say about you? They will talk as long as the world lasts, and one cannot expect them always to speak the truth; they want to use too many

words for that, but words hurt nobody, and you may be sure no one thinks of blaming you. And if they did, you won't mend matters, or stop people's tongues by shutting yourself up.' She fired up all at once I remember, and then turned as white as a sheet. 'Who—who talks?' she said, and then walked straight out of the room. I remember it as if it were yesterday; it was in the first winter after her marriage, when we were at Rome. I never dared to say another word to her on that subject, but it would have been better for her if she had gone out more; it was unnatural for a girl of her age to shut herself up as she did. But she had other notions too about her position as a married woman—Heaven knows what notions the child did not take into her head about herself, and her husband, and her duties—and all I could say was of no use. Afterwards, when things were different, and there was no earthly reason why she should not do as she chose, the old habits suited her best, I suppose."

Whether Mademoiselle Mathilde was right in her supposition, I do not know, but it is certain that the Princess Zaraikine cared little for the second-rate Parisian pomps and vanities that daily spread themselves out on the tree-shaded Place at the Eaux-Bonnes.

"Let us go for a walk, Humphrey," she said one day, "let us go to the ravine that you may finish your sketch, or else up into the mountains where we shall meet no one. You do not care to see all these people in their Paris dresses, do you? I think they are as inharmonious in the midst of these mountains and forests as an Italian opera air would be introduced into one of Beethoven's symphonies."

She laid aside her work as she spoke, whilst Humphrey, who thought that life held no greater honour than to walk at that fair lady's side, consented readily enough, we may be sure, and after this they made more than one excursion together in the long summer days. Sometimes accompanied by a guide, they went far up the mountain side. Sometimes they found their own way amongst the forest paths that stretched for miles in every direction. Sometimes they went no further than to a ravine lying directly above the village, where they passed at once from noise and gaiety into a world of wildness, solitude, and grandeur, forests rising on either side, a torrent roaring and foaming below; above, one snow-flecked peak that for ever caught the latest sunset gleam, or shone faintly radiant in the lingering after-glow.

Once leaving these higher mountains, these

upper gorges behind them, they wandered down to where in the peaceful, fertile, lower valley, amidst maize-fields and meadows, hedges and poplars, a little town stood on the winding stream—a little old town with one long street where heavy, arched doorways of black marble framed spaces of sunny green country beyond, where dried up faces looked out from windows above, and children in long-skirted frocks and tight little red and blue caps sat upon the door-steps below, or ran shouting and clamouring after the tall strange lady and her companion as they passed along the street. "*Un p'tit sou, madame, un p'tit sou,*" they cried, holding out bunches of half-withered flowers. Ersilia gave them all her sous, and presently had all the flowers, which the children, awed into sudden shyness by her thanks and smile, silently put into her hands.

The way from the Eaux Bonnes to this town was so long, as Randolph remembers, and they lingered so much on the road, that it was already late, and Ersilia was almost tired out before they turned homewards again; nor do I know how she would have got back at all, but for a friendly passing cart which picked up these two imprudent wanderers and willingly carried them on their way. A woman with her distaff sat spinning as they jogged along, a child at her feet gazed at the

strangers with wide-open eyes, an old, old man sat all huddled up in one corner. Presently the darkness fell swiftly, the long, white road gleamed always upwards, the amphitheatre of mountains loomed more and more mysteriously as the daylight tints faded, dim masses with sharply-cut summits defined against the shining stars, the transparent purple of the sky.

The cart rumbled along to the jingling of its bells; the child dropped asleep, then waking, cried out, frightened at finding itself under those solemn starry heavens, and the woman taking it on her lap hushed it to sleep again. She was a woman with a long, heavy, melancholy face, such as one sees in that part of the world—the men seem to follow a better type, keener, finer. Presently she began to talk in her odd French, and her voice was melancholy too.

“She had been to a wedding,” she said, “she had come a long way to it, and was going to sleep that night at the Eaux Bonnes; but she did not live there, she lived at Gabas, the village away up in the mountains,” pointing with her right hand. “She kept an inn, and when Monsieur and Madame came there, she hoped they would descend at her house. In the summer plenty of people came, and it was gay enough; but in the winter the snow fell

and blocked up the roads, and sometimes one saw no one for months together. She was used to it; she had lived there all her life, and had never been further down the valleys than that," pointing again to the little town that they had left behind them. "Did Madame come from a long way off? Were they Christians in the country Madame came from? Eh, she might have known that; a beautiful lady like Madame, with a face like a blessed saint, could not be anything but a Christian. Madame was married? She had no children? She, the woman, had four. Her eldest was a guide, as his father had been before him. If Monsieur wanted a guide at any time, no one knew the mountains better than her Baptiste—"

So she talked on in her low melancholy tones, combining business with gossip, after the fashion of her class; but presently she also ceased speaking, and all was silent as they jolted slowly onwards up the winding road. Only once, as the breeze blew chilly, Humphrey, who had swung himself out of the cart when the way grew steeper, and now walked by its side, helped Ersilia to wrap her shawl more closely round her.

"I am afraid you are cold," he said, filled with remorse at having led her so far from home, "and

I am sure you must be horribly uncomfortable in this jolting concern."

She was leaning back in her corner, her face turned from him towards the mountains, but she looked round at his words.

"I am a little cold," she said; "but I do not mind the jolting, and it is worth some discomfort to have this wide night view of mountains and sky."

She smiled as she spoke, to reassure him, and in the dim light he seemed to see all the mystery of those far-shining heavens reflected in her eyes, and was satisfied. As for him—that fair presence was near him, that sweetest influence was upon him; I think that at that moment he would have asked nothing better of life than to go on thus for ever through that clear darkness, beneath those stars, in that immense harmony of earth and heaven. Long afterwards—in truth, it was but a few months, but there are times when life is not counted by the calendar—long afterwards then, I say, Humphrey, making another star-lit journey with this same companion under other skies, looked back with a sort of wondering doubt on the unexpectant tranquillity, the accepted peace of this summer night—as one who, waking in the frozen darkness of a winter

morning, doubts of the golden light, the birds and flowers of the summer that has been.

I have heard that amongst Roman Catholics the women have a custom of sometimes going into *retraite*, as it is called, of retiring from the world for a while, to seek peace and quiet for meditation according to the capacity that is in them. I do not know how this arbitrary seclusion, this stated silence answers, nor whether worldly thoughts and troubles, restless ambition and anxieties, turn at a moment's bidding before those grated doors. But in some lives there come now and then natural *retraites*, as it were, when for a time life seems to pause, rest comes after labour, calm after sorrow, peace after the weariness of conflicting emotions. Such a time as this came, I think, to Ersilia during those early weeks in the Pyrenees.

"Now let us be silent, Humphrey," she would sometimes say, as they sat resting during their mountain excursions; and whilst he sketched at her side, she would sit for an hour at a time, her book lying neglected in her lap, occupied with thoughts in which he had no share, of which she never spoke to him. Old ties and associations were broken off, a past full of pain had ended in sadness; but a new life was opening before her, and each day, after these silent musings, something of new energy and

hopefulness seemed to light up her eyes, and tinge her cheek, as after years of self-repression, her young capacity for happiness and action began to assert itself again.

Sometimes, however, she would betray the course her thoughts had taken by beginning to talk of La Chênaie, Monsieur de Florian's estate, of which mention has already been made, and which at his death had passed to the Princess Zaraikine. Ersilia had an affection for the place, which she had known since her childhood; and she liked talking of it to Humphrey, describing to him the old grey walled château, the farm-buildings and neglected flower-garden, the woods rising steeply behind, the terrace and lawn sloping downwards in front to a narrow winding river. It was a country she loved, she said, for its perfect repose and stillness; she had already spent some weeks there since leaving Rome in the early spring; and she proposed going there again in the autumn, whilst Mademoiselle Mathilde paid some visits amongst old friends.

"But you are not going to stay there?" said Humphrey, in some alarm. "You told me you were going to spend next winter in Paris."

"Yes," she said; "I promised Aunt Mathilde that I would not leave her at present. She has

given up her Paris life for so many years, that she would feel lonely at first without me, so we shall be together next winter. Otherwise I should have remained in the country—that will be my home now, you know. But indeed, on my own account," she went on, "I shall not be sorry to be in Paris. I do not know that I have many rural tastes; a great part of the charm of our former visits to La Chênaie came through contrast, and I believe I should get tired of the silence and solitude after a time. I like to feel a great rush of life round me, to know that I am in the midst of large interests, even when I have no part in them, and though I have an affection for La Chênaie, I own that I have some dread of living there."

"But why should you live there," said Humphrey, "forgive me, but why should you ever dream of burying yourself in such a place?"

"It is my property now," she said, "there are people on the estate whom I am bound to know and to care for, whose welfare in some sort depends upon me. And I do care for them, only I cannot feel—how can I explain myself?—that they are in very great need of me, that my presence amongst them is essential to their happiness. My uncle's steward, who has managed the property for twenty years, takes excellent care of everything;

everyone is well off, and as contented as their lives will allow them to be; there is nothing that I can set about at once and feel that I am doing good. I have, indeed, some ideas—Utopian ones perhaps—that I greatly desire to carry out; but when I speak of them to my steward, he tells me they are innovations that it would not do for me to attempt just yet. That is why I feel that I ought by and by to go and live there, that I may gain a practical knowledge of all sorts of things that I know very little about at present.”

“If your people are so well off, I should let them alone,” Humphrey answered, “you would never be happy in such a life, buried in the country away from all you most care for. I know something about it; I know what a country life can be, and that one woman though she had been brought up to it as a girl, and so liked it in a way, never forgot the glimpse she had once had into a different kind of world.”

“Your mother?” said Ersilia, “I should like to have known her, Humphrey. I think her life must have been a hard one, but mine would be different from that, you know. And I should not always live at La Chênaie; I should come to Paris sometimes—perhaps, even go to Italy again some day.”

"That would be all right," said the lad. He broke off as they began to make their way down a rocky turn in the road; they had been crossing a sunlit flowery meadow as they talked, but now they were in the beech forest again, immediately above the grey roofs of the Eaux-Bonnes. In a minute they reached a wider path, and then Humphrey spoke again.

"That would be all right," he repeated, "still it seems to me hard that you who are so—so different, so—I mean," he said, changing the sentence, "it is hard that you should have to live at all amongst a set of boors."

"Do you mean the people at La Chênaie?" said Ersilia, "they are not boors, they are a very kindly people. At present, I don't understand enough about their lives and ideas to get on very well with them; all that I have known and cared for lies so widely apart from their interests, that I feel sometimes as if we were speaking to each other in strange languages. But perhaps in time I shall learn better, and after all it may be only a question of learning. I can imagine that a country life, rightly understood, may be full of interest, just as this silent forest is full of life and movement, if only we had the eyes to see and the ears to hear it."

"We don't want to hear it," said Humphrey, "it might deafen us to things we care more for."

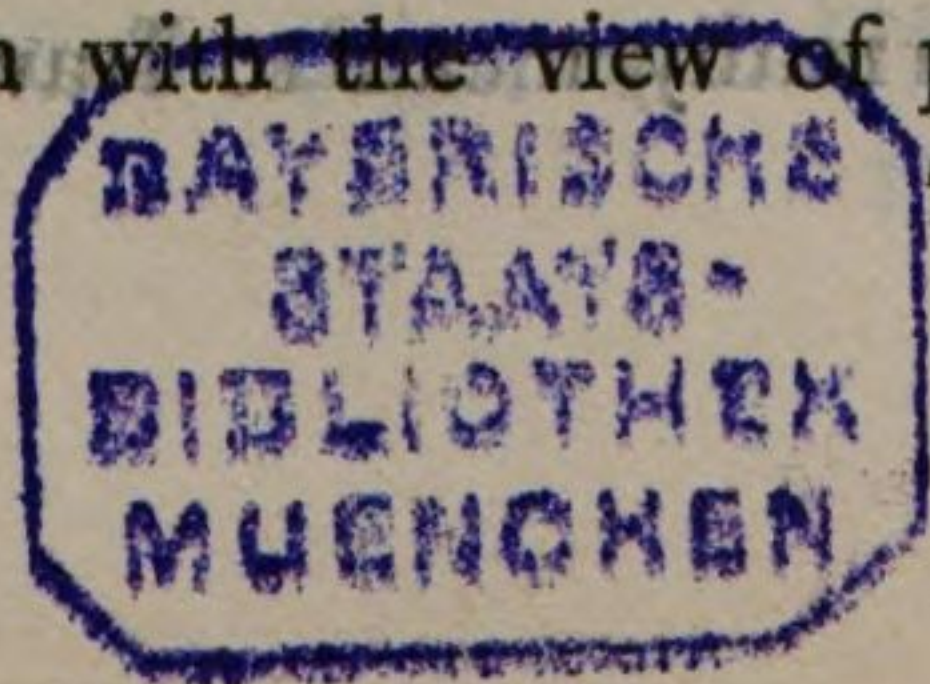
"That may be true for you, Humphrey, but not for me; I ought to know about many things that I am ignorant of, I should like to do good to these people if I knew how. They are not altogether happy; there is a pathos about their lives that it is not difficult to perceive and understand—their dumbness and blindness in the presence of beautiful scenes that might be a continual joy to them. I should like to change their lives in that respect if I could, but it is precisely there that I meet with difficulties—"

The path narrowed again, and she said no more, and Humphrey, too, was silent for a while, as they continued their descent through the forest. But presently the lad began to talk eagerly again, as was his custom when that kind lady was at his side—of his boyhood, of Mr. Fleming, of Rome, of all things in Heaven and earth. It was the last of those mountain rambles with the Princess Zaraikine—that very evening as they crossed the Place on their way to the hotel, he saw his master and ran to welcome him—but he did not know it. He never guessed as he guided Ersilia down the mountain path that the sun was setting on the last of those early days at the Eaux Bonnes, on which,

in his memory, no one shadow of darkness rests. No cloud, it seems to him, looking back now, had marred the serenity of the sky, or dimmed the sunlight falling on grey peaks above, on green sloping uplands below; no storm had broken the stillness of the night, as the stars rose and flashed and sank below the dim mountains; and to Humphrey it had seemed, I daresay, that they were alone, he and his cousin, in that Paradise of mountains, forests, and valleys, that those stars shone, that those sun-risings and sunsettings glowed for them alone, that those peaks rose on every side to shut them out from the world—the world that seemed to him so slight a thing since it was unconscious of his love. For the lad, as I have said, loved his cousin with that first love, which, be it the mother's for her first born, the girl's for her lover, the boy's for his mistress, lives apart in the memory as a peculiar and sacred revelation of all that is divinest in a human soul.

“The first effect of love is to inspire a great respect—we reverence what we love. This is very right; in the whole world there is nothing to be found as grand as this. . . . The pleasure of loving without daring to speak of it has its pain, but it has also its sweetness. What transport is there in shaping every action with the view of pleasing the

Ersilia. I.



one person whom one finds infinitely worthy of esteem." . . .

So said a writer of another age and land than ours, of an experience common to all lands and to all ages.

"But," he adds, "this state of mind cannot long endure."

CHAPTER V.

The Gates begin to close.

MR. FLEMING had come to the Pyrenees for a few weeks' holiday; but as it had already been arranged that he and Humphrey should together see as much as they could of the mountains, he had no intention of remaining for more than a few days at the Eaux-Bonnes. This, I say, had been already arranged before Humphrey left Paris; the two had talked over their plans together a dozen times, and the lad who had never travelled, had looked forward with delight to this excursion in his master's company. Yet, when on this first evening of his arrival Mr. Fleming already began to inquire about routes and guides, it was with a sudden pang that Humphrey thought of their departure.

"Do you really mean to leave the Eaux Bonnes

at the end of the week, Sir?" he said, "there is a great deal to be seen about here, no end of excursions and that sort of thing, I believe; and I have not made half of them yet. I have been waiting for you."

"Not made half the excursions, Mr. Humphrey?" cried Mademoiselle Mathilde, from her corner by the window. They were all sitting together in the Princess Zaraikine's salon. Humphrey had spent most of his evenings there lately; and Mademoiselle Mathilde, who loved society before all things, and would sooner have spent an evening in the company of her worst enemy than by herself, had sent word to Humphrey that he was to be sure to come as usual, and bring Mr. Fleming with him.

"What have you and Ersilia been doing every day for the last fortnight," she said, "if you have made no excursions?"

"We have been taking walks," the lad answered, colouring a little. "I have a number of sketches to show you, Sir," he continued to Mr. Fleming; "that is what I mean. You can have no idea what splendid points of view there are, unless you stay here quietly for a time."

"My dear boy," Mr. Fleming answered, pushing away the map he was studying, and laughing a little, "I came here to be quiet, and I have heard

more squeaking and drumming and fiddling in the last half-hour than come in my way in a month in Paris. What do you advise, Madame?" he said turning to Ersilia. "Are you of Humphrey's opinion that I should make a long stay here?"

"No," she answered, promptly, "there is scenery as fine, I believe, elsewhere in the Pyrenees, and if you dislike noise and bustle, you will not find this a pleasant place to stay in."

She was standing at the table in the middle of the room, pouring out tea. Humphrey went to take a cup from her hand, and as he did so he said, with a boyish petulance that he could not wholly repress, "I can't bear the idea of going away, but I suppose it makes no difference to you whether I am here or not."

"It will make a great difference, Humphrey," she answered, in her clear voice, "I shall miss you very much. But you know you told me long ago that you and Mr. Fleming were to travel together, so that I am prepared for the solitude in which Aunt Mathilde and I are to be left."

She smiled as she spoke, but Humphrey only felt disconcerted. He set down his cup, and walked away to the piano at the other end of the room. It was true that he had once told Ersilia of his plans—how many days, weeks, months ago? He

had hardly thought of them lately. Time had been standing still for him in these last days, and now all at once it had begun to move again; the sweet hours were slipping away that only yesterday he had seemed to hold in his hand; everything was beginning to shift and change. He sat down on the music-stool, and began strumming and striking heavy chords, looking out from his dusky corner at the lighted centre of the room. Mademoiselle Mathilde, with a *bonbonnière*, a big green fan, a shaded lamp, and some packs of cards, was establishing herself at a table apart. It was her custom to spend the evening in playing intricate games of patience, inviting every one to assist at her rare triumphs. Ersilia, who had finished her tea-making, went up to the old lady, and began laying out her cards, a preliminary task that she was always glad to be spared.

"I will do that," said Humphrey, coming forward into the light, "if you will go and play something."

"Yes, go and play by all means, Ersilia," cried Mademoiselle Mathilde, "but I will lay out my cards myself, thank you, Mr. Humphrey, you bring me bad luck; the last time you arranged them I found all the twos and threes in the top row."

"That was through want of experience," Humphrey answered, laughing; "I had not learned the art of shuffling the cards into the right places beforehand, Mademoiselle."

He went away to the window which was set wide open to the night, and stood looking out into the darkness, and listening to Ersilia's music. She did not sing, but I think no finer or more sympathetic playing than hers could be heard. The piano was a little old one that she had found in the room when she came, and which might have been good in its day, but whose harmonies had faded now to a mere echo of their former selves, neither cracked nor out of tune, but tinkling with a faint, melodious sound. Ersilia, after trying it, had laid aside sonatas, and preludes and fugues, and she sat now playing simpler, old-world tunes that better suited the worn-out tone of the narrow keys. Humphrey stood at the window listening to these measures to which the feet of a past generation had beat time, and which had gathered the plaintiveness that belongs to vanished joys. They seemed to him to be telling each other, like old, old people, of the good old times when they were young, better times than could ever come again; they harmonised with his mood, with the rustling night outside, with the clouds that were shifting and

gathering about the mountain tops and hiding the unchanging stars.

The music stopped at last; he was roused from his dream and looked round. Ersilia had risen from her seat, and Mr. Fleming, leaning forward in a low chair beside the piano, was turning over some of her music-books. Neither was speaking, but a feeling Humphrey had never known before prompted him to walk straight across the room to where Ersilia was standing.

"You have not played my favourite piece to-night," he said, in the petulant tone of reproach he had used before.

"Your favourite piece, Humphrey," she said, "which is that?"

"I thought you would have known," he said, "I have often asked for it—but no matter."

"No, I do not know indeed," she said perplexed, and perceiving that for some reason, and for the first time in her experience, he was out of temper.

"There are so many things that you like, and I thought I had played several of them to-night."

"Yes, you did, thank you," said Humphrey, half ashamed of his ill-humour; "I beg your pardon—it is no matter. Shall I close the piano for you?"

Then turning abruptly to Mr. Fleming, "Our best

route," he said, "would be over the Col de Torte and down to Argelès——"

"Is nobody going to bed?" cried Mademoiselle Mathilde from her table; "you can arrange your route to-morrow, Mr. Humphrey. Your playing is very pretty, Ersilia, but it distracts me exceedingly. I have not won a single game to-night."

CHAPTER VI.

Old Manuscripts.

MR. FLEMING and Randolph did not after all leave the Eaux-Bonnes at the time they had proposed. A day of gathering clouds, followed by a thunder-storm, was the prelude, as is often the case in those regions, to a week of persistent, pouring rain. Mr. Fleming, imprudently going out, returned home drenched and shivering, and found himself laid up the next day with a severe attack of cold and inflammation, with Humphrey established as his nurse, and the doctor for his daily visitor. This was an even drearier change than the lad had anticipated. He remembers well the grey days that followed, the mountains hidden by mists, the low-hanging sky, the eternal splash and drip of the rain.

Mr. Fleming was at no time dangerously ill, but he kept his bed for nearly a week, and rose from it utterly prostrate and exhausted. He was not a good patient; he rebelled against pain and weariness, and like most nervous, imaginative people, lived his sufferings twice over through anticipation. Humphrey who had had no experience in illness, used to lose patience and courage altogether sometimes, and would come dismally into the salon to consult the Princess Zaraikine and Mademoiselle Mathilde.

"You know all about illness, do you not?" he used to say to Ersilia, "what shall I do for Mr. Fleming? How can I cheer him? The doctor says he is better, but I can't help thinking he must be worse when I see him so restless and depressed." And Ersilia, who was well accustomed to watch tedious and lingering illness, would advise one thing and another, till at length, as the weather cleared and began to brighten into warmth and sunshine again, Mr. Fleming also began to get brighter and to recover health and spirits.

The principal rooms at the hotel had doors opening on to a wooden gallery that ran round a central courtyard; a cool breeze continually swept through this open corridor; there was a sound of running water from a fountain below; above, lean-

ing at night over the balustrade, one could see the stars flashing in a space of black sky. Humphrey was lingering here one evening on his way to Mr. Fleming's room, when he saw Ersilia coming towards him along the gallery shielding her candle with her hand. She paused when she saw him standing there.

"How is Mr. Fleming to-night, Humphrey?" she said.

"He is better; won't you come in and see him? He has been up since the morning."

"Will he care to have a visitor?" she said; "if you think so, I will come."

She followed Humphrey, as he led the way down a long passage to another part of the hotel. He and his master had rooms opening into each other, and since Mr. Fleming had been able to get up, Humphrey had arranged his own room to answer as far as possible the purposes of a sitting-room. But it was small and ill-furnished, and looked bare and gloomy now as he and Ersilia entered. The window was open on to the hot blackness of another and smaller courtyard, and Mr. Fleming, pale and thin, was lying on the sofa beside it, shading his eyes with his hand from the dim light of the little lamp. He looked round,

however, at the sound of the door opening, and Humphrey who came in first, went up to him.

"I have brought you a visitor," he said, pleased with the thought of cheering him, "the Princess Zaraikine has come to see you, Sir."

"She is very good; ask her to come in," said Mr. Fleming, starting up and looking dazzled and confused as Ersilia entered. She set her candle down where the light could not reach his eyes, and came forward to the sofa. Mr. Fleming who was still so weak that he could hardly stand, wanted to rise and bring a chair forward, but she prevented him.

"Pray do not move," she said, "or I shall think I am disturbing you. You are better this evening, I hope. I have been very sorry to hear of your illness."

"Yes, I am very much better," said Mr. Fleming.

"Humphrey, bring that arm-chair here for the Princess Zaraikine."

"Thank you," she said, "but I must not stay. My aunt is waiting tea for me. Will you not come and see us again, Mr. Fleming, as soon as you are able to leave your room? The other side of the hotel is cooler and pleasanter than this, and the change would perhaps do you good."

"This room is hot," Humphrey said, "when the

sun shines it beats all day upon that high rock that shuts us in at the back, and by the evening everything feels baked through."

"That is very bad," said Ersilia, "but there is always fresh air in our sitting-room, and I hope Mr. Fleming will make as much use of it as he likes. We should not disturb you at all in the mornings," she went on in her simple, cordial tones, turning to him, "my aunt is generally out, and I am either with her, or I sit in my own room. I hope you will come."

"Thank you, I will," Mr. Fleming answered. Then, as she prepared to go, he raised himself, and stood leaning against the back of the sofa. "Thank you too for your visit to-night, Madame," he said, "it has cheered me."

"Has it?" she said. "That is well. Illness in a hotel is very dreary, and you have suffered a great deal, I am afraid. What does Humphrey do for you? Have you plenty of books and papers?"

"Humphrey is a capital nurse," said Mr. Fleming, "he is a good boy, and reads me to sleep every night. I think we should be very glad of some books, should we not, Humphrey? We are nearly at the end of our stock."

It was, I think, two days after this, that Mr. Fleming, accompanied by Humphrey, made his way

to the Princess Zaraikine's salon. They expected to find it empty, for as Ersilia had said, she seldom occupied it in the morning; but when Humphrey opened the door he saw her sitting at the table writing with a litter of papers about her. The sudden draught of air sent them flying, she looked up and saw her visitors pausing in the doorway.

"Pray come in," she said, rising and coming forward through the dim room to meet them. "There are some work-people in my room to-day," she went on in explanation, "that is how it happens that I am here this morning."

"But we are disturbing you, I am afraid," said Mr. Fleming.

"Not at all," she said, "I have only a letter to finish, and then I am going out. I am very glad that you are able to come. Stay, I will open the outside shutter; there is not much sunshine to-day, and you will be able to look out upon something green."

She set open the shutter as she spoke, letting in suddenly a whole world, as it seemed, of fresh air and light, of mountains and forests, green and dark under a cloudy sky. The trees were blowing about in the Place below; a few people were sitting under them, or sauntering up and down; but the week of bad weather had brought the season to an

early close. Half the visitors had left, and the place was already comparatively empty.

"Thank you," said Mr. Fleming, "this is better than our prospect of four walls at the other side of the hotel, Humphrey."

He stood leaning against the window, looking out with new light in his eyes. All vague, adverse influences, sad and gloomy days, clouds, and mists and darkness, were apt to close in on Mr. Fleming's imagination like some intangible prison from which, in certain moods, he vainly strove to escape. Something of this he expressed to Ersilia now.

"I feel as the people do in the story books," he said, "when they have been shut up through some dismal enchantment, and the good fairy has come to set them free."

"That is a pleasant thought for me also," said Ersilia, smiling. "When I was a little girl I used always to think of what I would do if I were a fairy." All the kind thoughts that she had had seemed to be shining in her eyes as she spoke; she moved away, and began collecting her scattered papers. "Do you understand Italian, Humphrey?" she said.

"No," he answered; "not a word."

"Ah, then you cannot help me; I am in the

midst of difficulties in some work I have undertaken. Look at these."

She gave him some of the written papers with which the table was strewn; most of them were in her own distinct handwriting, but others, yellow with age, were covered with queer, twisted, and faded characters, which seemed to Humphrey quite illegible.

"What is this?" he said, "I cannot read a word of it. But Mr. Fleming could, I daresay; he knows all the languages and all the dialects imaginable."

"Do you really?" said Ersilia, turning to him.

"Not exactly," he answered, smiling; "Humphrey is sometimes given to hyperbole, I am afraid. But I do know Italian pretty well; can I help you in any way?"

"I will tell you my difficulty," said Ersilia; "these papers are part of a collection of old manuscripts that came into my uncle's possession one year that he was making a tour in Italy. He bought a boxful of old papers in some remote country place, and these were among them. I don't know if you care for such things, Mr. Fleming, but my uncle, who was a good judge, valued them highly."

"I do not wonder," he replied. He had come with his slow steps up to the table, and seating

himself opposite Ersilia, he began examining the papers. "I always envy collectors," he said; "no one draws such prizes in life as they do, and their satisfaction in them must be almost perfect. In manuscripts, too, they go on discovering all sorts of things one after another. These are written by different hands, I see; are they of any historical value?"

"Only incidentally," Ersilia said; "they are family papers, not very interesting in themselves, inventories and accounts, and memoranda for the most part, and some few letters; but my uncle thought them so curious that he determined to have them transcribed and published with a French translation. He would not let them go out of his own hands, and undertook the work himself, with the assistance of an old German friend who is very learned in such matters. I learned to read the writing easily, that I might help them; but my uncle died before half the papers were gone through, and left the completion of the work to me."

"I cannot think how you learned to read the writing," said Humphrey, "it looks to me worse than a cuneiform inscription."

He had a sudden distinct vision of Ersilia in some dim library studying and poring over the old papers with the two old men, and as he looked at

Mr. Fleming he seemed to see the same thought in his face.

"It is not really difficult," said Ersilia, "and I like learning almost anything. That is not my difficulty now. You see," she said, turning to Mr. Fleming, "these are written in ordinary Italian. But now and then in these letters that I am translating, I come upon words that are unknown to me, and as I cannot find them in my dictionaries, it has occurred to me that they may be provincial expressions proper to that part of the country. There is a letter here," selecting one and laying it before him, "written from Rome to some servant or steward; I am almost sure that I have read the words correctly, and yet there are several that I do not understand."

"I must ask you to give me your copy," said Mr. Fleming, "I cannot make out this old handwriting so readily as you do, Madame." He read the paper through carefully. "You are right," he said then, "these are provincial expressions that a master, in writing orders to a country servant, would naturally make use of. If you would allow me, I believe I could translate this to your satisfaction."

"It would be doing me a great service," said Ersilia, "I have been feeling very helpless in trying to puzzle it all out by myself. I was writing this

morning to consult my uncle's old friend, Herr——, but he is dilatory about correspondence, and my letter might have remained unanswered for months. But there is no hurry," she added immediately, "and you must not trouble yourself with it while you are not well."

"On the contrary," he said, "I shall like the occupation, and if you will give me any of the papers you would like me to look over, I will begin at once. It is a pity though, that they are not more amusing. I am sure you must get tired of copying endless inventories and accounts which are of very little interest in themselves."

"That is what I once said to Herr——," said Ersilia smiling, "and he told me that I had the feminine incapacity for seeing the relation of parts to a whole, and that if I looked at these things rightly, I should understand that the price of a cow in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, is a link in the whole history of mankind. I admitted his argument, but I still find these papers rather dull."

Mr. Fleming took the manuscripts, and devoted his morning to their study. He had reached a turning point in his illness, and from that day recovered rapidly. Humphrey, no longer in close attendance upon him, resumed some of his former habits, and one afternoon, two or three days later,

he went out to finish a sketch that he had begun before the commencement of the bad weather. On his return, he went straight to the salon, according to his usual custom, to show his drawing to Ersilia. She was sitting in her old place on the sofa by the window, copying a manuscript that lay before her. Opposite, in Humphrey's own place at the little table, sat Mr. Fleming. The lad, with his portfolio in his hand, went up to them. Ersilia, absorbed in her work, did not see him at first, but in a moment she looked up, and with a passing glance and smile at Humphrey, turned to Mr. Fleming.

"I believe I need trouble you no more at present," she said, laying down her pen, "I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Fleming. Through your kindness, I shall be able to do what I had almost despaired of doing—I shall be able to fulfil my uncle's wishes, and have these ready for publication in the autumn. He was very anxious that the work should be completed this year."

"If I can be of any further use, you must tell me," Mr. Fleming answered in the kind, courteous tones that gave a certain charm and distinction to his most commonplace words. "It gives me very great pleasure to be able to help you—"

Humphrey turned away. A strange feeling came into the lad's heart; he laid down his sketch-book

without a word, and seated himself silently near Mademoiselle Mathilde, who, as usual, was nodding over her book, at the other end of the room. She roused herself up, however, at Humphrey's approach.

"That is right, Mr. Humphrey," she said, "come and talk to me. There is something sleepy in the air of this place, I think; tell me something amusing, something that will entertain me."

Humphrey was always good friends with Mademoiselle Mathilde. He used to laugh at her a little sometimes, but she was good-humoured on the whole, and did not mind it. He had good manners, she was once pleased to tell Ersilia. "In the society of other young men," she said, "I perceive at once that they are thinking that I am old and ugly, that I wear a wig, and that they consider nobody over five-and-twenty worth speaking to. But with your cousin it is different. I do not even know whether he has discovered that I wear a wig or not. He treats me with the respect due to my age, and it pleases me."

Humphrey, to whom, as to all the world, Mademoiselle Mathilde's wig and rouge were sufficiently apparent, could not help laughing when these words were repeated to him. But these follies and vanities did not trouble him much. He liked the old lady,

who was neither very wise nor always very amiable for a certain sincerity and kindness of heart, that with all her faults made themselves felt, and he listened willingly enough whilst she went on talking.

“This place is getting extremely dull, now that everyone is leaving,” she said. “I shall be glad when I have finished my course of water-drinking (which has not done me the least good), and we can go on to the Eaux-Chaudes. Not that I expect to find it much livelier there. There is nothing so tiresome as staying in a place where one knows nobody. Even your being here has made a difference, Mr. Humphrey; and if your friend, your Mr. Fleming, if that is his name, had been a little more entertaining instead of falling ill the moment he arrived, and making us all more dismal than before—oh, you need not be alarmed, he is gone,” as Humphrey turned round hastily, “and now I hope Ersilia will put away all those old papers that she knows I hate the very sight of. I entreated her to keep them out of my way, and I have seen nothing of them for a long time; but now they have all come out again.”

Mr. Fleming had, in fact, left the room. Ersilia gathered her papers together, and came across to Mademoiselle Mathilde.

“I am sorry, Aunt Mathilde,” she said, seating

herself by the old lady, "but Mr. Fleming was good enough to help me, and you know my uncle——"

"Oh, you need not tell me about your uncle, my dear child! I knew him for nine-and-twenty years, and he was always the same. One day it would be a cart-load of old papers, another a roomful of china, another busts or pictures—he never could do anything in moderation, he was always in extremes. Now, I have no objection to a few well-chosen pictures, a few good pieces of old china, and so on; it is the usual thing in good society; it promotes conversation, and creates a pleasant variety. But in my brother-in-law's house, the thing was overdone—quite overdone."

"But, Aunt Mathilde, it was what my uncle cared most about doing, and he only kept what was really beautiful and worth preserving. If there were not some people who knew a great deal about such things, and who care for having them, everything that is old and beautiful would perish by degrees out of the world."

"That is so like you, Ersilia, you always have a reason for everything. It is a bad habit, my dear child; it fatigues one, and is useless; opinions are opinions and quite distinct from reason. My opinion is that there should be moderation in everything. But you are like your uncle, Ersilia,

you are always in extremes, and when you once get a notion into your head, you never get it out again. You have made up your mind never to go into society, and I suppose you never will."

"Dear Aunt Mathilde," said Ersilia, a little hurt, "I have promised to go out with you next winter in Paris, but in Rome it was different, you know."

"I know nothing of the sort," answered Mademoiselle Mathilde, "but I know it is simple waste for you to shut yourself up when you have a maid who can make dresses as your old Roberts can. You possess a treasure in her, a perfect treasure. As for my maid, Marie, she is a fool, an idiot, as I told her only this morning. She has not an idea in her head. I say to her, 'Marie, pay especial attention to that dress; I wish for one exactly like it, with such and such alterations, you understand.' She replies, 'Yes, Mademoiselle,' and produces the alterations, but nothing else. It is all alteration, absolutely different. The result is that I never have anything fit to put on, and one does not depend less upon one's toilette as one grows older. Not that I ever was a beauty," continued Mademoiselle Mathilde, frankly. "I am better looking now than I ever was in my life. Some people improve as they grow older; it is what you young people never will be-

lieve. You fancy youth and beauty always mean the same thing; but you are all wrong, Mr. Humphrey, although you look as if you did not believe it."

"I believe it implicitly, Mademoiselle," he answered, "it is a most consoling idea to me. I look forward with confidence to fifty years hence, by which time I may hope to have grown at least presentable."

"You are not so bad now," Mademoiselle Mathilde answered, nodding her head, "since you have cut your hair, and given up trying to look romantic, as you did when you first came here. If you would only put on a proper coat, instead of that old one that you insist upon wearing, you would do very well."

"You do not understand," said Humphrey. Ersilia had taken up his sketch, and was studying it while they talked, and the boy's momentary irritation, jealousy—he would have found it hard to give it a name—was gone. "Listen, Mademoiselle," he continued. "Since I have cut my hair short and given up romance, I have turned philosopher."

"Ah, yes, philosopher, we know what that means," answered Mademoiselle Mathilde, "you are young, Mr. Humphrey—very young."

Humphrey, who in fact wore an old coat, and

was quite in earnest about it, never dreamed of having a serious argument with Mademoiselle Mathilde. But presently when she had left the room, he lingered before going to Mr. Fleming, to explain to Ersilia what he called the philosophy of the matter.

"It is not a mere question of pleasure or appearance," he said, and proceeded to unfold I know not which of those theories which are the salt of life to young and ardent spirits, and of which Humphrey had his head at least as full as any other lad of his age and position. Ersilia, who was also young and ardent, sat listening thoughtfully, as was her wont, while he talked.

"I always like your ideas, as you know, Humphrey," she said, "they seem to me very good and pure and unselfish. I never heard anyone talk before as you do, and I think it is noble to care so much about altering the wrong and selfish things that have gone on so long that we hardly think about them. But I am not sure that I should like to set to work just as you propose. Everyone is not young, and if you had lived as much with old people as I have, you would understand that they often like best to do what good they can in the world as it is, without trying to make it different all at once. I think that, perhaps, when you

are a little older yourself, you will modify your views."

The first part of this speech delighted Humphrey, but there was something in the last words that wounded him as if they had held some sting.

"You think my ideas worthy of respect," he said, "you acknowledge that they have force and purpose, and are not without originality, and yet you still speak to me as if I were a mere boy."

He spoke quietly; she did not guess from his tone that he was vexed, and answered playfully.

"Why, so you are a boy, Humphrey," she said, "I am not so very old yet, but I am three years older than you."

Randolph remembers yet the very tones in which she spoke the words, the very storm of passion that they raised in his heart. He remembers the scene, the hour. It had begun to rain again, and the dusk was falling. Ersilia had drawn her embroidery frame to one of the windows, and was stooping over it to catch the last moments of the quickly-fading light; Humphrey standing at the other, was looking out on the drenched road and the splashing rain. In the room, as Ersilia ceased speaking, the only sound was the swift movement of her hand to and fro, the only brightness, the glimmer of her dress in the twilight. A sudden sense of darkness,

of utter loneliness and sorrow came over the lad; the tears rushed to his eyes.

"I can see no more," Ersilia said, laying down her needle. "Humphrey, will you help me to move this frame back into its place?"

He came silently forward, and carried the frame to its corner near the door; she followed him to arrange her work; it was dark at this end of the room, and she could not see his face, which was full of gloom and trouble as he stood watching her at a little distance. All at once, with a sudden impulse, he made two steps forward. "If—if I am indeed such a boy," he began with quivering lips, in a sort of choked voice, then stopped.

Ersilia was stooping down, engaged in covering up her work, and did not catch his words.

"What did you say, Humphrey?" she said, lifting up her head, and looking like some tall, dim, white flower, in the darkness.

"I must go to Mr. Fleming," he answered, and abruptly left the room.

But in the gallery he paused, leaning against one of the wooden pillars. The rain was pouring and dripping from a grey sky above, from grey eaves below, there was a cheerful clatter of plates and dishes in the distance, some one crossed the courtyard with a lantern; the light, slanting up-

wards, flashed across Humphrey's face and startled him.

"By heaven, I am a man, and I will prove it yet!" he cried.

It was by such words that Ersilia had power to wound the lad's heart, full of passion and love, whilst she never guessed at the wound, which he still had fortitude enough to conceal.

CHAPTER VII.

At the Piano.

It had long been arranged that as soon as Mademoiselle Mathilde had finished her course of water-drinking, she and the Princess Zاراикіne should go for a few weeks to the Eaux-Chaudes. Mr. Fleming's plans had been necessarily altered by his illness, and it came gradually to be understood that the whole party should make the same excursion at the same time. I think it was Mademoiselle Mathilde who first proposed the plan; she could not bear the idea, she said, of being deprived of the only society she had had for many weeks past.

"I should miss your coming in and out, Mr. Humphrey," she said, "and as for your Mr. Flem-

ing, I was mistaken in him, and I am not ashamed to own it. I thought he was one of your moody, ill-bred Englishmen, but I was wrong. He is rather silent, and I never know what to say to him when we happen to be alone together; but he has good manners. I know what good manners are—no one better.”

Mr. Fleming's manner always charmed women. Some one once said of him that his was a chivalrous soul born out of due time and robbed of its belief, and the words expressed sufficiently well that which gave an individual charm and refinement to a man who was not handsome, and who showed much indifference in the matter of tailors. Only, in his case, any such general belief would, I think, have been largely modified in any age by his particular views about women. To mere beauty he was too much accustomed for it to affect him beyond a certain point, and though he looked upon plain women as imperfect creations, he was tolerant of them when they were cultivated and intelligent and could talk well. But a touch of commonness in mind or speech repelled him, and from obtrusive, loud-voiced women he absolutely fled. But I do not think they ever found it out, for he had an habitual gentleness and deference of manner which arose from great natural courtesy and kindness of

heart, and which in a man whose powerful and delicate genius was known to all the world, could not fail to be flattering. Even Mademoiselle Mathilde who had no sort of respect for genius—she was no philosopher, but she held the advanced view that genius is a malady of which the less there is in the world the better—even Mademoiselle Mathilde, as we have seen, was won over; though, I believe that Mr. Fleming had no very great liking for the old lady, and seldom said more to her than was demanded by the ordinary courtesies of life.

Humphrey, we may be sure, offered no opposition to this change in Mr. Fleming's plans. He asked for nothing better than to be near Ersilia, and if henceforward he found pain as well as delight in her society, if her unconscious kindness, her sweet indifference at once soothed and chilled him, it will be readily believed that he was not the less anxious on that account to linger on in the one presence that had power to transform the world for him. Perhaps, after it was finally settled that they should remain at the Eaux-Bonnes, he thought that those old mountain walks with his cousin might be resumed, but if so he was disappointed. It happened then as it often does in life. People fall into some pleasant habit, and fancy, perhaps, that it will last for ever. There comes a slight break, of

no importance they think; to-day it rains, but to-morrow it will be fine. But to-morrow it rains again, and the next day the relative position of things is altered; the charm is broken, and refuses to work again. Twice, indeed, Humphrey asked Ersilia to join him in his walks, but on the first occasion she was busy with her manuscripts; Mr. Fleming was giving her invaluable help, and she wished to devote the afternoon to her work. The second time she consented, but it did, in fact, begin to rain (for the weather was broken) and she could not go.

Humphrey did not mind the rain. A restless spirit was in the lad during those last days at the Eaux-Bonnes. He took long walks by himself over the mountains, starting early, and returning late, wandering for hours amongst forests, and ravines, and upland pastures. They were wanderings that did him no good. To a mind preoccupied with its own selfish cares and anxieties, the voice of nature, like the voice of human brotherhood, is apt to be dumb, and Humphrey's self seemed continually to stretch before him as he walked, like some huge, darkening shadow that he could never overstep. Only afterwards, that sweet, changeable world of flying mists and clouds and peaks came back to him with a remembered accuracy of detail,

where at the time he seemed to see nothing. What dull change had come over him? he sometimes wondered. Only a few weeks ago he had been looking forward to Mr. Fleming's arrival, longing with a lad's frank enthusiasm to make the two people he most cared for in the world known to each other, and now . . . Why had he never learned Italian, he thought, with a sort of rage. Why could not he help Ersilia?

Some such thoughts as these were in his mind as, drenched and muddy, he returned home long after dark on the last evening of their stay at the Eaux-Bonnes. He dined alone, and then made his way to the salon, whose friendly lights he had seen shining through the grey as he crossed the Place an hour before. It already looked rather bare and deserted, for Mademoiselle Mathilde, who had a fancy for packing up everything three days beforehand, had swept away all her own and Ersilia's small properties. But there were some big logs burning on the open hearth, and the three people gathered round them looked so quietly at home, that Humphrey had an odd momentary feeling of being an intruder as he walked up to the little circle. Ersilia was reading aloud; she had done so once or twice before when they had all been together in the evening. She read well, and liked

doing it, she said, for she had been accustomed to read to the Princess Zaraikine, her mother-in-law, and to her uncle, whose sight had failed very much during the last year of his life. She closed the book, however, as Humphrey came in, and looked up with her kind smile of welcome.

"How cold you look, Humphrey," she said, rising to make room for him by the fire. "Let me give you some tea. Where have you been?"

"I don't know exactly," he answered, shivering and warming himself. "To the top of a mountain I think; but I lost my way in the mist, and I hardly know where I went or how I got home again. I saw a curious effect about sunset," he went on. "I wish you had been there; in twenty years one might not see the same thing again. The clouds parted for about a minute, and showed a number of peaks high up in a clear sky, with a red glow on them and the full moon above. Where the peaks are now, I cannot say; when I saw them they were several thousand miles off."

"I know," said Ersilia, with a sudden light in her eyes. She gave Humphrey some tea, and went back to her seat at the table, where Mr. Fleming was drawing by the light of the shaded lamp.

"Several thousand miles," cried Mademoiselle Mathilde; "what are you talking about, Mr. Hum-

phrey, and what makes you so late this evening? I am glad you have come back at last, for you must positively learn to play patience to-night. I have kept out the cards on purpose. Who knows? at the Eaux-Chaudes we may have neither room, nor table, nor anything else that is suitable."

"I would learn with pleasure, Mademoiselle," answered Humphrey, trying to excuse himself as he had often done before, "but I am so stupid, and if we have music it will distract me."

"Not at all—you are not at all stupid," answered Mademoiselle Mathilde; "and as for the music, you must pay no attention to it. It used to distract me, but I never even hear it now. So you can play if you like, Ersilia."

"You will give us some music, will you not?" said Mr. Fleming, looking up from his drawing. "Your playing is a new delight to me; I never heard any quite like it before. Other people play with their fingers and their minds; but with you the music seems also to come straight from your imagination, as if you were improvising as you go on."

"That is strange," answered Ersilia, "for I cannot improvise at all. That gift of music living like a language in people's minds to express their thoughts has always seemed an unknown sense to

me. And I am really ignorant altogether about music—I know nothing of the science. I should like to understand it as you do, Mr. Fleming, to be able to disentangle the parts of a symphony, and know why each note is in its own place. It must be like following the great thoughts of a master as they arise in his mind.”

“I am not sure that it would add as much to your enjoyment as you think,” answered Mr. Fleming, rising and going to open the piano, “the science is delightful in itself, but I am content sometimes to forget it, that I may enjoy the mere sensation of perfect sound.”

“Do you mean that you prefer the feeling to the thought?” said Ersilia doubtfully, “perhaps I should also if, like you, I had a background of knowledge to fall back upon. But that is always my difficulty; I care about so many things, and I seem to know them all through feeling instead of through real knowledge.”

“I mean,” said Mr. Fleming, answering her indirectly, “that the sort of feeling you have is better than a good deal of the knowledge people get hold of. Half of what they take a great deal of trouble to learn, only justifies what some minds can grasp by intuition.”

"But that is just what I should like," said Ersilia. "I should like what I feel about things to be justified by facts. It is the same with painting as with music. I should like to study anatomy and composition, so as to have a real understanding of the pictures I have learned to care for. You know," she went on, "I cannot do things. Humphrey," laughing a little at the lad, who had followed them to light the candles, "Humphrey cannot forgive my stupidity. He cannot think how anyone can be so dull as neither to paint pictures nor compose sonatas. But I think I always care more about knowing than doing; if one can appreciate the works of others, one's enjoyment is quite limitless."

"You are right," said Mr. Fleming, "you are happier so." He sat down on the music-stool, and began to play softly, looking at Ersilia, who was not looking at him, but who sat thinking in the low chair by the piano, leaning a little forward, her cheek resting on her folded hands.

"It is not a question of personal happiness," she said at last, without moving, "nothing is so splendid as real creative genius; one cannot be quite content to be without that which one reverences so highly in others. Besides, there are times when one feels——" she broke off, then be-

gan again abruptly, as if uttering her thoughts as they came into her mind. "I have known of artists at Rome," she said, "who spend their lives in efforts that never lead them beyond a certain point. I suppose they are right to follow their strongest instinct and highest aim, but that impulse to create without the power of creation always seems to me a very melancholy one. I have sometimes thought that to lose oneself in a higher life than one's own, would be the best and noblest; one can partly do that through understanding the great minds of all ages. I would rather do that than feel myself bound to spend my life in working out my own smaller thoughts."

"It is for minds such as yours that workers live," said Mr. Fleming, rising and giving her his place at the piano. Then in a different tone, "Did you know many people at Rome?" he said.

"No, very few," she answered. "I have known very few people all my life. What would you like me to play, Mr. Fleming?"

"Everything," he said, "I don't know whether we shall be without a table at the Eaux-Chaudes, as Mademoiselle Mathilde fears, but it is very possible there may be no piano."

"That will be a pity," said Ersilia smiling, "for I think I always play my best to you. There are

one or two people to whom I cannot play at all; I know that they are out of sympathy with the music, and that takes all the meaning out of the notes for me also."

Humphrey, held captive at the card-table by Mademoiselle Mathilde, looked more than once across the room to where, round Mr. Fleming and Ersilia, two wax candles made a circle of light. They shone on the polished floor, on the open music-book resting against the faded red silk back of the piano, and on the subtle harmonies of colour where the tender whiteness of Ersilia's hand met the yellowing ivory of the keys, the yellow whiteness of the lace ruffles round her slender wrist. From where Humphrey sat he could not see her face, but he could watch the motion of her fingers, whose touch, at once strong and delicate, seemed to have power to awaken long slumbering tones of sweetness and passion in the worn notes. As Humphrey sat listening and dealing out kings, and queens, and aces under Mademoiselle Mathilde's direction, he remembered how once, before Mr. Fleming's arrival, he had asked Ersilia to teach him some piece of music, and how they, in like manner, had spent an evening together at the piano——

"What are you doing, Monsieur Humphrey?"

cried Mademoiselle Mathilde. "That is all wrong, I do not believe you have attended to one word I have been saying. Have you any idea of the first principles of the game?"

"Certainly, Mademoiselle," answered Humphrey, "when you think you ought to move a card, do not touch it; keep it till it is of no use—I mean till it is of more use."

He answered at random, for he was looking at Ersilia again. She had left off playing, but she still sat at the piano, listening while Mr. Fleming talked. At the moment that Humphrey looked up, she turned her head to speak, and then he could see her face lighted up and overspread with a sudden momentary blush that faded almost as it came. Ersilia did not often blush, and perhaps it was the transient glow on her pale cheeks that recalled to Humphrey his sunset view; but he felt all at once that had the mists parted once more to reveal Ersilia and Mr. Fleming wandering together beneath the moon in that clear red twilight land, he could not have received a stronger impression of their being alone together in some far-off, separate world.

It was only a moment's vision. It passed as Ersilia rose from the piano and came towards the card table.

"Do play one piece more," said Humphrey, getting up too, and pushing the cards away, "I have not been able to listen to you properly, and perhaps, as Mr. Fleming says, we may have no piano at the Eaux-Chaudes."

She went back to the piano at once, hesitated for a moment, and then flushing up again, began to play one of Chopin's Polonaises. They all sat listening, silent even when it was finished, for the wild, hurrying, pathetic music smote their hearts with something at once of exultation, and mournfulness, and pleading. As Randolph recalls it now, it seems to him that no fitter ending to their last evening at the Eaux-Bonnes could have been found.

They all left the next day, Mademoiselle Mathilde and the Princess Zaraikine in a carriage, Humphrey and Mr. Fleming on horseback. As they passed down the street, Humphrey turned and looked once more at the little village lying in the afternoon sunlight, at the white hotel, the green mountains, the lingering groups of idlers, all that had made the back-ground to his life in these weeks that were gone. He has never seen it since. Once indeed, years afterwards, he visited it again, but it was in the late autumn; the hotels were empty and shuttered, the Place was deserted, and

the first snow of the season lay lightly upon the ground.

CHAPTER VIII.

Enter Charlotte.

A NARROW gorge leading straight into the heart of the mountains, opens abruptly from the wider valley that slopes downward to the plain. Where the road, hewn from rocky precipices, widens to a ledge overhanging the torrent, cluster the few houses of the Eaux-Chaudes. The sound of the waters fills the air, great mountain cliffs rise on every side, peaks beyond peaks close in the view. Above the village the gorge narrows again, a cascade comes leaping down out of the mountain side, a bridge crosses the torrent, and the road following the other bank of the stream leads onwards through wild passes into Spain.

"I like this better than the Eaux-Bonnes, don't you, Sir?" said Humphrey to Mr. Fleming, "I think even the air feels fresher here; there is no atmosphere of Paris finery." He was leaning out of an upper window as he spoke, looking down upon the one narrow street of the little village. It had been raining, and through the grey mist flocks and

herds with tinkling bells were being led down from the mountain pastures; three dirty Spaniards sat playing cards upon a low stone wall; the curé stood looking up at the clouds and chatting to Humphrey's host, the postmaster. Just opposite, a few steps led down to the little platform where the hotel stood on the edge of the steep bank above the torrent. They had written beforehand to secure apartments, but some mistake had arisen; there was not room for all the party, and Humphrey, by the advice of the landlady who was in despair at the misunderstanding, had taken a bed-room at the post office. It was to be for a night or two only, he was told; but the lad took a fancy to his quarters where he had more independence, and more space for his sketch-books and portfolios, and other miscellaneous property; and though he always breakfasted and dined at the hotel, he kept on his first apartment to the end of his stay.

Behind his room, another smaller one led through a glass door to a wooden gallery running nearly the length of the house, and looking upon the green mountain side which rose immediately behind. Randolph has more than one sketch taken from this gallery, of the one or two white cottages scattered on the slope, of the precipices above, the purple peaks rising behind. As he looks at them

now they recall to him the freshness, the sweetness the gaiety even of those days at the Eaux-Chaudes. In that little village, high up in its narrow gorge, life seemed simpler and freer than at the Eaux-Bonnes, and the change did the lad good in a way. He tried to shake off the dull wayward mood that had been creeping over him, to forget the nameless trouble (he would not name it to himself) that oppressed him. Ersilia was there, from hour to hour he could still see her, talk to her—he would not count the hours as they went; he shut his eyes to the end they might bring. He climbed the mountains, he rambled with his master through the wild and sweet land, twenty times a day he went backwards and forwards to and from the hotel, once he gave a tea-party in his little gallery-room, when Charlotte poured out the tea, and it was Ersilia who cut the bread-and-butter—but I am anticipating; I have yet to tell of Charlotte's arrival.

It was on the afternoon of the third or fourth day of their stay at the Eaux-Chaudes, that Humphrey, who was mounting some sketches in his own room, saw an open carriage drive up to the door of the hotel, and a party of travellers descend—a French maid, two flapping straw hats and grey frocks, and a tall lady, who, after a shrill altercation with the driver, disappeared, sweeping her party

before her within the dark interior, leaving the man shrugging his shoulders and turning his money over and over in his hand. That same evening at the table-d'hôte, there were three places laid for these new-comers, but it was not till dinner was nearly half over that a sound of footsteps and rustling dresses outside the door announced their arrival. The tall lady, a very elegant and gracious person with sandy hair, a lace cap, and a high aristocratic nose, came first. She was followed by a little girl of eleven or twelve, who had also a high nose and sandy hair, and who was nicely dressed in a white starched muslin frock with a broad sash; and then after a moment's pause, in a tumbled little grey frock, shyly and hurriedly, conscious of being late, came a slender little maiden of seventeen or so, with soft dark eyes, and soft yellow hair, shining as floss-silk, and like floss-silk with a tendency to fly out and entangle itself with every breath of air.

The lady who spoke French and English alternately and with equal facility, took her place at the table, with much talking and arranging of her violet silk flounces.

"Are these the only places left for us?" she said, "then be so good as to shut that window. I never sit in a draught; it is a rule that I have been obliged to lay down in travelling. You had better

go opposite, Charlotte," this to the little grey maiden, "and Rose can sit by me. No—no soup, thank you. I never eat soup in hot weather. The water, Charlotte, and hold up your—— Why, Mr. Fleming, what a delightful, what an unexpected pleasure! I have been looking for you everywhere in the Pyrenees, and had given up all hopes of seeing you. Where have you been all this time?"

"Not quite everywhere," Mr. Fleming answered in his most courteous tones; "at the Eaux-Bonnes for the greater part of the time. How are you, Miss Grey?" shaking hands with Charlotte. She sat next to him, and opposite her aunt, who occupied the end seat on the other side of the table, with her daughter Rose between herself and Humphrey.

"We, I think, have been everywhere," Mrs. Grey went on, "to Bagnères, Luchon, Cauterets, Gavarni; and I am delighted—quite delighted with the country. There is something so—so original about it all. It is singular that Switzerland which is also a mountainous country, should be so very different from the Pyrenees; but so it is. I do so envy you the privilege—what is this? Izzard? no—no izzard, thank you—I do so envy you the power of transferring these beautiful scenes to paper, Mr. Fleming. I quite long to see some more of your de-

lightful sketches. Have you been drawing a great deal?"

"Hardly at all," he answered, "and if you want to see sketches, Mrs. Grey, you must let me introduce you to Mr. Randolph; he has been hard at work." Then turning to his shy little neighbour, "How do you like the mountains, Miss Grey?" he said.

"Oh, indeed!" was Mrs. Grey's answer. She scanned Humphrey with a look in her hard, light grey eyes, which seemed to say this was not at all the same thing. "Are you fond of sketching too, then?" she inquired.

"It is my business," Humphrey answered bluntly, feeling by no means flattered, and not at all pleased by having this stream of eloquence turned upon him. But it was exhausted, or Mrs. Grey, perhaps, considered him unworthy to receive it, for with the exception of an occasional remark to her little daughter, she said no more.

There was a fashion in this primitive little place, where everyone seemed to live out of doors, of lingering outside the hotel door on fine evenings, looking over the low stone parapet at the torrent foaming below, watching the light fade and the gorge fill with darkness, while the stars came out above the mountain-tops. The shadows fell early

at the Eaux-Chaudes; neither sunrise nor sunset could be seen there; but sometimes as the day declined, the strip of blue sky overhead flushed with a sudden glow, soft pink clouds floated along, down in the narrow street a dreamy reflected light seemed all at once to suffuse with a new sentiment the groups chattering at the open doors, the children springing up and down the steps, the mountain-girls walking swiftly along, with many-plaited skirts and folded capulets; voices chimed and harmonised as though heard from afar. "The sun is setting somewhere," we would say, with a thought flying, perhaps, to sails reddening on distant horizons, to reapers in wide harvest-fields binding their sheaves in the ruddy glow, to city towers and spires flaming on far misty plains——

This evening Mr. Fleming and Humphrey, coming out as usual, found Mademoiselle Mathilde and Ersilia, who had not dined at the *table d'hôte*, already seated with some books and work on a bench under a tree. Ersilia came forward to meet them, and Mrs. Grey, who had fastened on to Mr. Fleming as he left the dining-room, drew him aside at once.

"Who is that?" she could be heard saying quite audibly. "The Princess Zaraikine? Zaraikine—I don't remember the name. Whose daughter do

you say she is? M. de Florian's? What, M. de Florian at Rome? Oh, his niece—yes, yes, exactly; now I remember all about it—yes. You must introduce me, Mr. Fleming, you must indeed. I might almost venture to introduce myself," Mrs. Grey went on almost immediately, as she came up to the Princess Zaraikine. "Your uncle, M. de Florian, was so well-known to me for so many years, that I can hardly look upon you as a stranger."

"I am always glad to meet any one who knew my uncle," answered Ersilia, surprised, but with simple cordiality.

"I can hardly say that I myself knew M. de Florian—not personally," said Mrs. Grey; "I never saw him, but I used to hear so much of him from a dear, a very dear and old friend of mine. She also was a collector of antiquities, of gems, and statues, and—and antiquities in short; a very distinguished connoisseur. 'If dear M. de Florian and I were not such friends,' she used to say to me, 'we should be bitter enemies. We always want the same thing. I have the greatest respect for his judgment, but I flatter myself'—her way of talking was rather peculiar, dear old lady—'I flatter myself that I have a slight superiority, a feminine superiority, in matters of taste.'"

"Will you not come to the bridge?" said

Humphrey, suddenly turning to Ersilia; "there is a light on the mountains that will be worth seeing from there, but it will be gone in a few minutes."

"I will come," she answered. "You are speaking of old Lady Caroline G——, who died in Rome a year or two ago, are you not?" she said to Mrs. Grey. "I never saw her but once; but I have often heard my uncle speak of her, and Mademoiselle de Brisac knew her very well. Aunt Mathilde, you remember Lady Caroline G——?"

"Whom on earth was Mrs. Grey talking about?" Humphrey could not help asking, as Ersilia walked away at his side.

"Of an old Irish lady who used to come to Rome every winter," she answered, smiling. "She made collections of all sorts of things, as Mrs. Grey says; but I think her friendship with my uncle was partly imaginary. He rather avoided her. He used to say that she would buy any rubbish that the dealers offered her, and then be very angry with him for not taking it off her hands."

They were walking quickly along the village street as they talked, but by the time they arrived at the bridge the light was already fading. In front, a soft white cloud was drawn across the mountains, dark peaks appeared above; behind and higher up some bright, orange-red clouds were still

floating. The fresh scent of the box trees was in the air, and a wind was stirring here and there, ruffling Ersilia's hair as she stood with uncovered head silently leaning against the parapet of the bridge: the darkness behind her, all the light from the sky on her face.

There was a sound of approaching footsteps. Ersilia did not move; but Humphrey turned round and saw Mr. Fleming and Charlotte Grey coming towards them.

"I have brought Miss Grey to see the cascade," Mr. Fleming said; "will you take her up there, Humphrey, before it is too dark?"

"It is rather dark already, I am afraid," he answered, but he led the way up a little winding path to the right. Charlotte followed dutifully; but it was dusk amongst the trees and bushes, and I do not know that she much enjoyed the expedition as she slipped and stumbled over the stones. They paused at the best point of view, and Humphrey, who was always fascinated by the ceaseless rush and dash of the water, stood staring down into the depths with his companion at his side; but presently turning round, he met a wide-eyed, half-frightened gaze, so like that of a child, that he could not help smiling. Charlotte did not smile in return. Her lips began to pout, her eyes filled with

tears; but there was apparently something in the lad's face that encouraged her, for she came closer to him, and said piteously:

"I have lost the key of my box, and I can't get any of my things out. Do you think there is any one here who could open it for me?"

"Plenty of people, I should think," answered Humphrey, at once amused and touched by this artless confidence. "Have you asked any one at the hotel?"

"Aunt Maria told me that in a little wild place like this there would be no chance of finding a locksmith," said Charlotte, half sobbing; "so that she would have to go away again directly, and that I had spoilt all her and Rose's pleasure. I—I never meant to. I wish we had never come to the Pyrenees!"

CHAPTER IX.

Charlotte's Troubles.

MRS. GREY relented apparently towards her niece, and consented that her box should be opened, for Charlotte appeared brilliant the next day in a white frock, with blue ribbons in her yellow hair, and Mrs. Grey herself announced that she considered the Eaux-Chaudes to be the most charming place she had yet seen in her travels, and that she intended to prolong her stay there indefinitely.

"If there were no other inducement," she said, "that of finding myself amongst so many friends in the midst of these charming scenes would, in itself, be sufficient. Dear Mademoiselle de Brisac, I trust you will allow me to look upon you as something beyond a mere acquaintance, you who have known so many of those most dear to me."

Mademoiselle Mathilde was quite willing to receive Mrs. Grey as a friend. The old lady's instincts (which, to do her justice, were generally true enough) somewhat failed her here. She pronounced Mrs. Grey to be a very delightful and distinguished person, highly connected, and evi-

dently accustomed to move in the best society. Before two days were over, she had somehow found out all about her—that she had a brother who was a baronet with large estates in ——shire, that her husband had been in the Austrian embassy, and had died about five years before in Vienna, that Charlotte was his orphan niece whom he had adopted, and who would some day have a large fortune of her own—all this, I say, Mademoiselle Mathilde had found out before two days were over. She and Mrs. Grey discovered I don't know how many friends in common besides Lady Caroline G—. Humphrey used to see them sitting with their heads together on the bench outside the hotel door, and their conversation, no doubt, was sufficiently edifying, if not sufficiently witty, to be worthy of a place in a volume of French memoirs.

Mademoiselle Mathilde, however, was the only one of the party in whose eyes Mrs. Grey found favour. To Humphrey, indeed, she became much more gracious after the first day. "I had no idea," she said to him, "that you were the cousin of the Princess Zaraikine, *and* the young artist, some of whose works I so much admired in Paris. We must be friends, Mr. Randolph; I adore the works of genius. Had I the means, my walls should be covered with them; but as it is, I am obliged to

content myself with one or two gems that I am fortunate enough to possess. A Sir Joshua, a Gainsborough, two Romneys; the best judges have pronounced them to be real treasures. When we return to Paris, where I propose spending the winter, I shall be delighted to show them to you. I shall often see you at my house, I trust; I delight in gathering round me the—the rising genius of the day, all that is most distinguished in painting, in music, in poetry.”

“You are very good,” answered Humphrey, feeling somewhat mollified, but a good deal bored. Mr. Fleming, who had known Mrs. Grey in Paris, as he knew half the fashionable world who visited his studio, laughed when Humphrey repeated to him this little conversation.

“You are caught, my boy,” he said, “you will have to go. Mrs. Grey has left off asking me, but young fellows like you mustn’t give themselves airs. I thought you would soon hear of her pictures; I know them well; they are family portraits and very good ones. She calls one of them a Gainsborough; it is no such thing, but a good picture, nevertheless. She carries them about with her everywhere. ‘These are my passport to the world of art,’ she says. I wish you would change places with me at the *table d’hôte*, Humphrey. I can’t stand sitting

opposite to her any longer; she oppresses me—I hate to see her withering up that poor little niece of hers with stony glances. I ate no dinner at all yesterday.”

Humphrey laughed and agreed willingly enough. He did not mind Mrs. Grey and her stony glances, and he thought it would be pleasant to sit by the little niece, who was soft and gentle and pretty, and who blushed when she was spoken to.

“What have you been doing to-day, Miss Grey?” he said, as she took her seat by him at dinner that evening, “you have been on some excursion, of course, everyone makes excursions here; besides, I saw you and your cousin come riding on donkeys down the street. I see everything from my window at the post-office, you know; all the sheep, and the goats, and the shepherds, and the donkeys, and the Spaniards. I saw a fat Spanish lady on a mule ride up to the door of the hotel to-day. They couldn’t take her in, so she was obliged to go further on, and presently two wicked-looking men in sashes and broad hats, like brigands, came riding after her. Perhaps they meant to rob and murder her in the loneliest part of the gorge; she looked as if she might have a good-sized money-bag amongst her packages.”

“Oh, do you think so?” said Charlotte faltering,

then seeing that Humphrey was laughing, she began to laugh too. "We went to the Grotto to-day," she said, "it is very pretty there in the forest, there was a hut with charcoal-burners, only I slipped off my——"

"The salt, Charlotte," said Mrs. Grey, suddenly. There was a salt-cellar close to her, but her words had the desired effect of making Charlotte jump, and of reminding her that her aunt's eyes were upon her; nor could she be prevailed on to say another word during the remainder of dinner.

Charlotte confided no more of her woes to Humphrey, but he was not long in discovering that she had other and even worse troubles, perhaps, than that of the loss of her keys. The very next day, as he and Mr. Fleming were walking up one of the little, steep, zig-zag paths cut amongst the trees on either side of the gorge, they came suddenly upon a bench set in an angle and a crumpled-up little figure sitting on it, crying bitterly, with her yellow hair all blown across her face. She looked up, startled by the sound of footsteps and hastily crushed an open letter into her pocket, but her flow of tears was too impetuous to be stopped at once, and she could only turn away her head,

and try to stifle her sobs by burying her face in her handkerchief.

Her distress was so evident, and the two had come so suddenly upon her, that they stopped involuntarily. But in the same moment, Charlotte recovering her presence of mind, sprang up and fled away down the narrow pathway, leaving Mr. Fleming and Humphrey to look after her with genuine pity.

"How wrong of us to come and disturb her," said Mr. Fleming. "What can her trouble be, I wonder? It is so sad to see a child cry like that. Perhaps that aunt of hers has been bullying her again. I believe women have ways of tormenting each other that we know nothing about, Humphrey. I have seen that little girl wince and colour at some side hit that I failed to understand; and she is a nice, pretty little girl, too. Speak to your cousin about her, Humphrey; ask her to befriend her."

Humphrey did speak to Ersilia, and after this Charlotte was often in the Princess Zaraikine's salon, where, according to our old custom at the Eaux-Bonnes, we sometimes met in the evening. After the *table-d'hôte*, a little figure was almost always to be seen lingering for a moment on the lower step of the staircase. Sometimes, when a

shrill voice came sounding from above, "Charlotte, where is Charlotte? What are you doing down there?" the girl would start and run. But more often Ersilia would say, "Can you spend the evening with us, Charlotte?" Then an upper door would close with a bang, and Charlotte, springing joyfully from step to step, would accompany the Princess Zaraikine upstairs. In two days the girl had learned to cling to Ersilia, whose own past experience of loneliness had its chief outward expression in an indescribable tenderness for all lonely and suffering things.

But, indeed, we all liked little Charlotte. There was something gentle, tender, confiding about the child that won our hearts, and it seemed hard that a simple little soul that demanded only a little warmth of affection to unfold as naturally as a flower opens in the sunshine, should be closed up by the chill influence of a hard, unkindly woman. It was not a great deal that she demanded. One might have travelled all over that little heart, and found in it no very profound depths; but neither would one have found one harsh, or arrogant, or grudging thought; and if it was but a dim little world in which she moved, bounded by the horizon of her own cares, and loves, and sorrows, those loves and sorrows were very pure and unselfish.

She was seventeen, and yet she was more of a child than her cousin, Miss Rose, who held up her head primly when her elders spoke to her, who discussed the latest *modes* with her mamma, and criticised the visitors at the *table-d'hôte*. This young person exhibited a strict propriety in all her words and movements. She was seldom seen to run, or jump, or climb; but she took daily exercise up and down in front of the hotel, with her grey stuff toes turned out, and a white parasol over her wide straw hat; she had brought big books with her to continue her studies during her travels, and was altogether a very good and conscientious little girl. Charlotte also made heroic efforts to be good, as I believe she would have called it; but, somehow, her collars never would sit straight, her pretty hair would come tumbling down, she turned shuddering from the big books, and once confessed, blushing and laughing, that only a year ago she had taken possession of a big doll that Rose had thrown away, and hiding it away in her own room, had amused herself with making clothes for it. Everyone laughed at this confession, and Humphrey inquired whether she had the doll with her at the Eaux-Chaudes. "No," she said, shaking her head; "it was a year ago, and she did not care for such things now." A sad look came into her

face, her eyes filled with tears, and she was silent as she sat on a low stool, leaning her head against Ersilia's knee.

What were Charlotte's troubles? That they were not wholly occasioned by her aunt was evident, for even when with us her tears were almost as ready as her smiles, and what appeared a mere trifle was sometimes enough to send this little April maiden into one of her sudden fits of weeping. Thus, on this same evening, Humphrey began lamenting, as he often did, that there was no piano in the room. "We have no music at all now," he said. "I wish some one could sing—cannot you Miss Grey?"

"I can if you like," Charlotte answered, rather to his surprise. She sat up, and, without further preface, began a little German Volkslied—she knew German very well, having lived in her childhood in Vienna. It was a wild and simple air, and her voice was sweet, and clear, and fresh as a child's—like a child's, too, in that touch of pathos that comes from the very absence of expression. But towards the end of the third verse she all at once faltered and broke down, and whilst the rest were applauding, she gave a sob, flung her arms round Ersilia's neck, and then slipped out of the room.

Ersilia sat still for a moment, then rose and followed her.

"That girl is a complete goose," said Mademoiselle Mathilde, who alone regarded Charlotte with some disfavour; "she does nothing but cry and laugh, and has no more notion of dressing herself than a baby. Every young person," she continued severely, addressing her remarks to Mr. Fleming and Humphrey, "ought to know how to tie a bow and stick in a pin. That little Charlotte is never fit to be seen; her gowns are tumbled the moment she looks at them. But it is the way with half the English girls one meets; they have no idea of how to put on their clothes. Who ever saw a French girl with her collar crumpled as soon as it is on, and her hair flying in every direction at once? The excellent Mrs. Grey has had a world of trouble with that girl, and can make nothing of her. She has told me all about it; she speaks of her with the greatest affection, and continually laments her perversity."

Who knows? Mrs. Grey very probably thought herself right in her estimate of Charlotte. She naturally looked upon her niece from the point of view that most affected herself; for nothing but a rare generosity and clearness of vision will enable us to judge of those connected with us with re-

ference, not to our own natures, but to theirs, and I do not know that Mrs. Grey was especially endowed with either of those qualities. She can have had little in common with that simple, idle, loving little heart, and I daresay thought the girl wilful and perverse, when she was only frightened out of all presence of mind. Others, who loved Charlotte for herself, could judge her more kindly both then and afterwards.

Ersilia presently came back alone. She took up her work again, but her hands trembled, and in a minute she let it drop.

"Poor little Charlotte, poor little girl!" she said at last, as if she could not help it, and sat leaning forward with a loving look in her eyes, as though Charlotte had been still before her.

Mademoiselle Mathilde had left the room, and no one answered for a moment. In the silence, the frightened cry of a child was heard in the road below. Ersilia started at the sound as though in sudden pain.

"I think there is no end to it," she said, clasping and unclasping her hands tightly once or twice.

Mr. Fleming came round from his seat at the other side of the table and stood opposite to her,

leaning on the back of the arm-chair that Made-moiselle Mathilde had quitted.

"No end to what?" he said.

"To this—this hurtling of the world, this clashing of hard pain and wrong-doing with things that are too weak and young to understand or meet them. With older people it is different; they have—they ought to have courage and endurance. But it is so hard to see a child hurt or grieved; it does not know what it means—or people feeble with age. I once saw an old man weep, and I understood then what is meant by the tragedies of life."

Her own tears, her rare tears came to her eyes at the recollection. She started up and began to pace the room. She was not thinking of herself, but it was from her own past experience that she was speaking. In a moment she began again.

"There is little Charlotte—I think no more guileless, innocent little soul ever lived, a creature so weak and tender, too, that one would like to make a sunny place in life for her to move in, as one sets a child on a sunny lawn to play with the daisies. She is only a child, and yet—"

She broke off abruptly, and paused in her walk. There was a window in the room, that opened immediately above the torrent; the night was warm and it was open now. The moonlight streamed on

the mountain-cliff opposite, making it look like veined marble; the waters foamed white below; in the stillness of the night their sound was like confused voices mingled with thunder echoing from the mountains. Perhaps it suggested Ersilia's next words.

"I have sometimes thought," she said, coming back to her seat and speaking more calmly, "how it would be if we were all at once able to hear all the cries of pain and sorrow that are being uttered round us—how dreadfully they would fill the air; still more if we could hear those that are not uttered. It is a thought that comes across me sometimes when I feel happy, just as a very lovely day makes me feel that somewhere in the world there are grey skies and pouring rain."

"Surely that is morbid," said Mr. Fleming, "and, forgive me, such feelings do not seem to belong to you of right. I can no more associate them with you than I can think of the rainy days you speak of, on one of these golden mornings here. I am happy, and thankful for the happiness."

"I know one forgets," said Ersilia, too much in earnest not to answer his words directly, "I am happy, too—I cannot help it. But I do not think that my feeling, when it comes, is morbid; I am sure, at least, that it would not be, if I could act

upon it. There is one person," she said, "who always comes to my mind when I think of care and trouble; with her, feeling always passes at once into action, and her life is one of the most harmonious that I know."

"Who is that?" said Mr. Fleming.

"It is a Mrs. Sidney—I should like to tell you about her, Mr. Fleming," said Ersilia, with the sweet look of confidence that comes from the certainty of sympathy with the speaker, if not with the words. "She has been my friend ever since I was a child. She is older than I am, but we were at school in Paris together, and we married about the same time. Within three years of her marriage, she lost both her husband and child, and was left almost alone in the world. She was quite heartbroken for a time, but she has told me that it came upon her one day like a revelation, that her own sorrow had interpreted to her what she never could understand before, the great sorrow of the world. I daresay most people have had the same sort of feeling, but there are few, I think, who act upon it as she has done. She had no family ties, and she gave up all her old habits and associations to go and live as a poor woman amongst poor people, that she might learn to know them and their wants better."

"I can understand your admiring that," said Mr. Fleming, "it is very fine. But she must have a genius for that particular sort of goodness—it is a gift like any other."

"With her, it is a gift of love, I think," Ersilia answered, "I never knew anyone so possessed with the love of her fellow-creatures. She is not what is generally called clever, but she has a sort of wisdom that I cannot describe; she has gained great influence over the people with whom she lives, and she uses it in the best and calmest manner. Yes, you are right, Mr. Fleming, she has a genius for goodness, and her life satisfies her."

"It is not a life that would satisfy you," he said.

"No," answered Ersilia, "it would not satisfy me—"

"You would like—" began Humphrey, after a minute's pause.

"I should like so many things, Humphrey," she said rising, as Mademoiselle Mathilde came into the room, "why is life so rich and so beautiful, and so endlessly sad, but that we may go on longing amidst its contradictions?" And then Mademoiselle Mathilde, who was a punctual person, sent them all off to bed, as it was her habit to do at half-past ten every night.

CHAPTER X.

A Tea Party.

It was about this time that Humphrey gave the tea-party of which mention has already been made. He made great preparations for it, and the kindly people of the house did their best to assist him. There were flowers to brighten the dim little gallery room; a big iron pot boiled and simmered amongst the logs on the wide hearth, a tea-pot had been found somewhere, and an odd assortment of cups and saucers; there was a pile of wild raspberries and a great mass of white, new-pressed curd to eat with them. It was for the afternoon, whilst the sun still streamed brightly on the green mountain slope outside, that the party was arranged, and everyone came. Mrs. Grey set her chair in the glass-door that led on to the old wooden gallery, and declared herself charmed with everything.

"I delight in these *al fresco* entertainments," she said, "one may almost call this *al fresco*, Mr. Randolph, with these fresh breezes blowing in, and that lovely view before us. I have sometimes thought that of all the ages of the world, that of Boccaccio

is the one I should have chosen to live in—Boccaccio or Watteau—I am not sure that I should not have preferred Watteau. There is something in the pastoral scenes he represents, that always fascinates me.”

Ersilia, as I have said, cut the bread-and-butter on this occasion. I am not sure that Charlotte’s little fingers would have had the necessary strength and skill, but Humphrey, who wanted to do the girl honour, asked her to pour out the tea. I am afraid that under her Aunt’s eyes it was an honour that she did not greatly appreciate. She went on pretty well, however, for a time; but presently in a rash moment, when no one was looking, she lifted the iron pot from the fire and filled the tea-pot to overflowing, with disastrous results to the second cups.

“There is something very odd about this tea,” said Mrs. Grey, casting her eyes up to the ceiling and speaking to no one in particular, whilst poor Charlotte got redder and redder behind her tea-pot.

“I apologize a thousand times,” cried Humphrey, rushing to the rescue, “I am afraid this French stuff is not very good, and I did not put in nearly enough to begin with, but we will soon set that to rights,” and he began shovelling in fresh spoonfuls of tea.

“Not at all, not at all,” Mrs. Grey answered, somewhat abashed, but rallying, “the *tea* itself is excellent, Mr. Randolph; in fact, everything is delicious. There is nothing I like better than these entertainments *sans façons*. You do not drink tea, Mademoiselle? Well, perhaps you are right, but for myself, I own it is a necessary of life. Another cup, Charlotte, *before* you put any more hot water in.”

“Let me give you a screen, Miss Grey,” said Mr. Fleming, leaning forward and handing Charlotte Mademoiselle Mathilde’s large green fan which lay on the table, “Humphrey has had no mercy on you, you are in the hottest part of the room there, just by the fire,” and poor Charlotte, whose tears, as we know, were always ready, was glad to hide her burning cheeks and winking eyes behind this friendly shelter.

The party broke up by degrees; Mademoiselle Mathilde went off to the Etablissement, asking Rose, to whom she had taken a great fancy, to accompany her; Charlotte slipped out after them; Mr. Fleming had a sketch to finish in the afternoon light. We saw him walking along the rocky path that led up the mountain at the back, and Mrs. Grey ran out into the gallery to watch him.

“Mr. Fleming looks very pale and thin,” she

said, coming back, as he disappeared behind some bushes, "I am afraid that he works too hard, Mr. Randolph. He is all soul—all soul, and I fear that the sword may be wearing out the scabbard. I watch him sometimes as he walks up and down in front of the hotel, and wonder which of his beautiful works it is that is occupying his mind. And that reminds me, Mr. Randolph, where are the sketches that you promised to show me? I have been longing to see them ever since my arrival. You are not going away, Princess?"

Mrs. Grey had not succeeded in improving the acquaintance she had begun with the Princess Zairaikine; for Ersilia, who did not like her, and who, though perfectly and unaffectedly cordial in her manner with strangers, was apt to be rather silent in their company, had held aloof with a certain dignity and simplicity that had somewhat baffled Mrs. Grey. She sat down again now, however, and began to help Humphrey to place his sketches in the best light as he took them out of his portfolio.

"This is indeed pleasant," said Mrs. Grey, arranging herself, and raising her short-sighted eyeglass, "I expect a real treat, Mr. Randolph. No, pray do not take those away," as Humphrey laid aside some rough beginnings. "I like to see *everything*; an artist's first inspiration often seems to me

even more valuable than his finished work. This view is taken from the Eaux-Bonnes, you say? Beautiful indeed—You were there for some time, I think,” turning to Ersilia. “I should much like to know your opinion of it as a place to stay in—indeed, I have been longing to have some conversation with you on this and other subjects; you know many of my old friends I find, and I want especially to ask you about that poor young creature, Frances Sidney. It was only yesterday that I learned from Mademoiselle de Brisac that you are acquainted with her.”

“I do know Mrs. Sidney very well,” answered Ersilia, “she has been my friend for many years.”

“Ah, then I could not have applied to a better person—beautiful, *most* beautiful, Mr. Randolph—I have so much wished to know the real truth of those sad stories that were afloat about her.”

“About Mrs. Sidney?” said Ersilia, in extreme surprise. “We cannot be thinking of the same person.”

“Oh, it is the same, I am sure,” answered Mrs. Grey, “on that point I could not be mistaken. I knew her mother well, and this poor young thing lost her husband and child not three years after her marriage. It is said—beautiful again, Mr. Randolph—the wrong way up, is it? Ah, now I see;

but clouds and mountains are so much alike, you know."

"I see Mr. Fleming coming back," said Ersilia, who perceived that Humphrey was fast losing patience at Mrs. Grey's graciously vague way of turning over his sketches, "perhaps he is in want of something; I believe I know all these drawings pretty well if you would like to go to him."

"Yes, pray do not let me detain you," said Mrs. Grey, affably, "we can discuss these together afterwards, Mr. Randolph; I shall thus have a double pleasure. But as regards Mrs. Sidney—I was about to say that I have heard more than once, and on the best authority, that she was desperately in love with a young Italian Count in Rome, and that the discovery broke her husband's heart."

"I cannot sit here and allow such stories to be repeated of my friends," said Ersilia, flushing up with an indignation that she did not attempt to repress, "I do not know who can be wicked enough to invent them. Mrs. Sidney had a younger sister who died three years ago at Rome, and who was engaged to an Italian gentleman; he has since married, and there is no foundation whatever for what you have heard. If you know Mrs. Sidney, you must understand how impossible it is to connect such a story seriously with her name."

"I can hardly say that I knew her—not personally," Mrs. Grey answered, "but I knew her mother, and I am much pleased to hear what you say. I shall make a point of contradicting the story wherever I go—"

Humphrey waited to hear no more; he escaped from the room, and went to find his master. Mr. Fleming was sitting on the low stone wall outside the hotel, smoking and placidly looking at the torrent; a cloud had come down, he said, and hidden his view. He was greatly amused by Humphrey's indignant account of what had passed.

"That woman can talk nothing but scandal," the lad said in much wrath; "if she did not want to look at my sketches, why on earth did she make me pull them all out? I didn't want to show them to her."

"The young man of genius does not like his works to be slighted," said Mr. Fleming, laughing at him, "never mind, my boy, she admired your picture in Paris, you know—it is a great point to have got some one to admire that."

Humphrey lingered outside until he thought Mrs. Grey would have done talking and turning over his sketches, and then went back to his rooms. As he mounted the few steps leading up to the street, he saw her come out of the front door and

turn into the little post-office attached to the house, and going upstairs he found Ersilia alone in the dim room, where the fire was dying down, and the light fading as the sunshine travelled up the mountain-side. She was sitting where he had left her on a chair in the open doorway, but as she turned towards him on his entrance, there was a pale look on her face that startled him.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked hastily, going up to her.

"No, nothing," she answered, rising, and beginning to collect the scattered sketches, "did you meet Mrs. Grey? She has just gone."

"I saw her go into the post-office," said Humphrey, "I was glad to keep out of her way. Are you sure there is nothing the matter?" he repeated.

"I am out of temper—nothing worse," she replied, trying to smile; "and when you came in, I believe I was wishing that people did not provoke me so much. This world does not always suit me, Humphrey; one ought to love one's neighbour, I know, but I cannot always do it. There are faults that I cannot readily forgive—faults that are common, that vulgarize a character, that destroy all the harmony and kindly feeling of life. I cannot like the people who have them."

"If you mean Mrs. Grey," answered Humphrey, "I think her the most intolerable woman I ever met."

"Indeed I do not think there can be many like her," said Ersilia, "she has been talking ever since you went away, Humphrey, and I cannot pardon her the things she has said, the insinuations she has made, the slurs she has cast. What can one say to a woman like that, who hints and shakes her head, and will not even speak out?—'a very strange story somewhere; you know, you understand—' How should I know? how should I understand? No one ever spoke so to me before. I cannot bear to think of the things she said to me; I feel as if I must myself have been in some way to blame."

She looked so much moved as she spoke, that Humphrey on his side felt a keen emotion.

"It is all my fault for leaving you alone with her," he said, "why should you trouble yourself about her gossip and scandal? I daresay it is all lies."

"Yes," she said, "I know that to you it must appear mere feminine gossip, not worth thinking about; you do not know how cruel it is. But do not let us talk of it any more. See, there is Mr. Fleming come to look for you. Let us take a

walk and forget Mrs. Grey. I shall have time, I think, to finish my sketch in the gorge before dinner."

Ersilia had begun to draw under Mr. Fleming's directions. "I had a few lessons in Rome, when I was a girl," she had said to him one day, when they were talking together, "but my uncle, who had no belief in the value or beauty of women's drawing, discouraged me then, and of late years my time has been taken up in other ways."

"Why should you not draw?" Mr. Fleming had answered. "You want to arrive at the heart of knowledge, and in drawing, at any rate, nothing will help you more than some practical experience to begin with," and Ersilia had ended by begging a sketch-book of Humphrey and setting to work.

They accompanied her now to the point in the gorge from which she was taking her sketch, and, leaving her there to draw by herself in peace, prolonged their walk for half an hour. On their return, she showed them her drawing. It was merely a pencil outline, and imperfectly executed, no doubt; but she had rendered with great spirit and accuracy the soaring upward sweep of the mountains as seen from the gorge of the Eaux-Chaudes.

"You are right, Mr. Fleming," she said, as

they turned towards home, "I have already learned at least one lesson. I understand now, as I never did before, how it is that artists can become enamoured of grandeur of form, apart from colouring. Those mountains—how shall I express it?—they seem to tower above one as one draws, and yet to wrap one round and possess one with their own beauty and grandeur."

They all walked back together to the village, and then Humphrey, who was in the habit of securing the letters as soon as they arrived, turned into the post-office. The mail was just in, and the postmaster was engaged in sorting out the letters; but after a few minutes' delay he found one for the Princess Zaraikine, and the lad took it across to the hotel.

He found Ersilia in the salon with Mademoiselle Mathilde, awaiting the summons to dinner. She opened her letter, glanced through it, then started up.

"This is dreadful," she said; "I must go home at once."

"Go home!" cried Mademoiselle Mathilde. "What are you talking about, Ersilia? We are not to leave this till Saturday week, as you very well know. What is the matter? Whom is your letter from?"

"It is from the steward — from Leroy," said Ersilia. "He tells me that a fever has broken out at La Chênaie, that it is in more than half the houses in the village, and that a woman and child have already died of it. It is owing to the hot season and heavy rains, he says. The cottages are old and badly drained, but he can do nothing without my authority. See, here is his letter, Aunt Mathilde. Oh, why did he not let me know before it was too late? I shall write to him at once, and tell him to expect me back immediately."

She crossed the room hastily, and sat down at her writing-table whilst Mademoiselle Mathilde read the letter.

"I can really see no cause for all this excitement," she said, folding it up again, and looking very much fluttered. "You startle one so, Ersilia; you have no consideration for other people's feelings. How can we possibly go back immediately, when it is settled that we are to stay till Saturday week, and travel with Mrs. Grey? You know I cannot bear to be hurried."

"I had no intention of hurrying you, Aunt Mathilde," answered Ersilia. "I know that you could not start immediately; but I can make the journey with Roberts, and as you have to pay visits on your way back, and we should not in

any case travel together further than Angoulême, I thought you would not mind my starting a few days before you."

"What! stay alone in this dismal hotel?" said Mademoiselle Mathilde. "Never. I should go out of my mind in three days with the noise of the wind and the water; it is only just endurable as it is. I never was so sick of a place in my life. Your whole scheme is absurd, Ersilia. What are you going to do when you get to La Chênaie? You will be of no use. The fever is sure to be infectious, and you will probably catch it and die. Don't expect me to come and take care of you; I should not think of running such a risk. But I know it is of no use talking. If you once take a thing into your head, you are so obstinate that nothing in the world will put it out again."

"Dear Aunt Mathilde," said Ersilia impetuously, flushing up, and with tears of impatience in her eyes, "what is the use of calling me obstinate, when I must do what I think right? If there were a thousand risks I ought to go. I don't believe there is the least danger of my taking the fever, but that can make no difference one way or the other. These people are my care; if I had known better what to do before, this would not have happened

perhaps. They have, at least, a right to expect that I should go and help them in their trouble."

She began writing again, but laid down her pen in a moment, and sat looking very much perplexed and discomposed.

"Let me be of some use," said Humphrey, coming forward and speaking for the first time. "Cannot I set off at once with any messages, or orders, or anything you want to send? I would go anywhere in the world for you."

"Thank you, Humphrey," she answered, pre-occupied; "but I ought to go myself if I can manage it. I was considering what it would be best to do."

"Oh, if the party is to be broken up at all, we had better all go," said Mademoiselle Mathilde, beginning to repent of her opposition, but still too much out of humour to withdraw it graciously. "No one can say that I have ever expressed a wish to stay here a day longer than is necessary, and I am not at all sure that I should like travelling with Mrs. Grey; she has so many boxes. It was she who proposed it, not I. I suppose, Ersilia, you will allow us sufficient time to have our clothes packed properly? Let me see, to-day is Tuesday—will Friday suit you? Very well then, let us start on Friday. I shall go at once and speak to Marie,

that she may begin her preparations without delay. She is so careless and stupid, that we have not a moment more than enough."

Mr. Fleming had come into the room whilst Mademoiselle Mathilde was speaking. He went up now to the table where Ersilia was writing.

"Are you going away on Friday?" he said.

"Yes," she answered, faltering a little as her eyes met his; "I have had some bad news from La Chênaie. Will you take the trouble to read that letter, Mr. Fleming? You will understand then how it is."

He took the letter and began to read it, whilst Ersilia went on writing rapidly. Presently she looked up.

"You see I must go," she said, with a slight emphasis on the words that seemed at once to deprecate and to set aside all further opposition. "Self-reproach after the event is of very little use to those whom our errors most affect; but I cannot help feeling that if I had looked into my affairs more thoroughly last spring, and trusted less to our old steward, this might not have happened. The cottages could have been set to right by this time."

"That was not one of the schemes that he disapproved of then?" said Humphrey, remembering a former conversation with Ersilia. The question was

not well-chosen, perhaps, but in truth, the lad hardly knew what he was saying. He was full of the wretchedness of this blank wall of separation let down, as it were, between him and the sunny days that he had thought yet remained to him. He spoke as one speaks in dull bodily pain to break the misery of sensation.

"No," Ersilia answered, "I never thought of the drainage, Humphrey; my schemes were of quite another kind." She began folding-up and sealing her letter. The dinner-bell was ringing, but Mademoiselle Mathilde was not yet come back, and no one heeded the summons. "One of my plans I still hope to carry out," Ersilia went on, "though I do not know when that will be now. You know," she said, turning to Mr. Fleming, "the greater part of my uncle's collections was sold at his death, but many of the things he most valued he left to me. I have a great desire to build a large library or museum at La Chênaie to receive them, which would always be open to the people of the village, even when I was not there, so that the collection might in some sort become public property."

"Is there anyone there who would care for them?" said Mr. Fleming, "fine works of art and the people who can appreciate them are compara-

tively so rare in this world, that I have a feeling that they ought not to be separated."

"That is what I think too," answered Ersilia, "but my idea was that this collection should be a kind of school where the village people might receive an education that would enable them, by degrees, to understand and appreciate what they see there. I have been very much laughed at, and blamed too, for this thought; indeed, old Leroy told me that to carry it out at all, as I proposed, would create so much prejudice and misunderstanding that I have given up the plan for the present. But I have a very strong feeling about it, nevertheless. I do not think we should rest contented in seeing some of the noblest pleasures of life confined to a few. I think everyone ought to have a share in them, and as these families on the estate are the people with whom I shall have the most to do, I should like to try to make them understand some of my own best pleasures."

Ersilia spoke eagerly, with an enthusiasm that lighted up her face and made it—so one of her listeners thought—more beautiful than he had ever seen it before.

"I understand your idea," Mr. Fleming said in answer, "I think that in itself it is a very noble one.

It would be well if more people thought as you do in these matters."

"But you too think my plans Utopian?" said Ersilia.

"I do not say so," he answered, "I do not know the details of your scheme. But I am not sure that you understand—a mind like yours hardly could understand perhaps—how difficult it might be to make even a first impression where the intellect has been untrained for generations."

"But I should like to be the one to begin the training," said Ersilia, "I daresay that much could not be done with the old people, but many of the younger ones are very intelligent, and I feel sure that they might learn a great deal that would help them on, by giving them wider and more beautiful views of life. No, I do not give up my plan yet," she said, smiling a little, "Aunt Mathilde often calls me obstinate—I think that perhaps I am," and then Mademoiselle Mathilde, for whom they had been waiting, came bustling into the room, and they all went downstairs to dinner.

CHAPTER XI.

The Gates close.

SOME distance beyond the Eaux-Chaudes, the mountains that hem in the gorges on either side open abruptly to the left, revealing a land of wild ravines and valleys that lose themselves among the forest-covered peaks, the dark slopes, the bare precipices that rise on every side. A path winding amongst these leads, it is said, to a distant lake, and an expedition to visit it had been already arranged for the day following that on which Ersilia received her letter. Mrs. Grey was unwell and could not be of the party, but everyone else went, on ponies, on donkeys, and on foot. Even Mademoiselle Mathilde, who liked excitement and amusement in any shape, and dreaded nothing so much as an hour's solitude, was willing to exchange the anxieties of packing for the difficulties of this mountain road, along which the little lad who served as guide, conducted them.

The path they followed sank rapidly from the upper road of the gorge to the wild broken ground of the valley below; then mounting again, led on-

wards through the silent forest. To the left was a deep ravine filled with trees; beyond rose the wall of a great terraced mountain, its bare summit yellow against the blue sky; in front, through and above the trees, peaks rose into view. The sunlight streamed down upon the moss and undergrowth, a cow with a clanging bell strayed across the path, birds were singing somewhere in the forest, there was the far-off sound of an axe, and then all was silent again.

"I think this is an enchanted land," said Ersilia, standing still for a moment on the shadow-flecked path. She had dismounted from her pony, which Humphrey was leading; the rest of the party had gone on, and were, for the moment, out of sight amongst the trees. "I have sometimes thought," said Ersilia, walking on again, "that there is nothing I should like better than to be possessed, if only for a single day, with one of the old-world beliefs in haunted woods and streams, and mountains. Imagine what it would be, Humphrey, to believe this whole land around us peopled with unseen rustling forms that might at any moment reveal themselves. I do not know whether one ought to think of fawns and hamadryads in a Pyrenean forest, but I could be quite contented with mediæval wood and mountain demons."

She spoke playfully, as she often did to Humphrey, but he could not answer in the same strain. The lad was in a state of feverish excitement, none the less real that it was hidden under a gloomy and silent exterior. All night long he had paced his room, or flung himself upon his bed to toss restlessly from side to side. The coming separation, the abrupt ending to these weeks of what he told himself was the only real life he had ever known, that he ever could know; above all, the gnawing conviction of which he was only the more intensely conscious because he obstinately strove to stifle it—the boy was in a mood half-desperate, half-despairing.

“I don’t see that the old beliefs are wholly lost to us,” he answered. “I think they were passions and memories that took form to people the old world, and these are with us still if we have eyes to see them. I know for my own part, that if I were ever to visit these woods again, I should find every step haunted by a presence as sacred and as beautiful as ever Greek or Roman imagined.”

“What do you mean, Humphrey?” said Ersilia, turning round with a startled look in her eyes; he had spoken in a voice that she had never heard from him before. “You are in earnest, whilst I was only in jest,” she said calmly in a moment, “but

you are right. I suppose an old belief never is wholly lost to us; the spirit cannot die, and the form too, before it changes, is most often cast in some imperishable mould."

"That is not what I meant," answered Humphrey, "I mean—," but an abrupt turn in the path brought them to where the rest of the party were standing, awaiting their arrival.

"Mr. Humphrey, I do beg of you to keep near me," said Mademoiselle Mathilde, as soon as they appeared, "I never saw such a road as this in my life, and it is growing worse and worse. I believe we have taken the wrong turning, and that it does not lead to the lake at all. I fully expect to return home with a leg or an arm broken; my pony has stumbled half-a-dozen times already."

The path, in fact, grew wilder and rougher, as it wound upwards and deeper into the forest; the ground was more broken, and trunks of trees uprooted in some storm or washed down by some torrent, continually obstructed the way. Charlotte and Rose got off their donkeys and left the animals to scramble on as best they could; but Mademoiselle Mathilde, insisting upon dismounting and mounting again at each one of these barriers, kept Humphrey continually occupied in helping her. At another time he might have been amused or bored;

now he was indifferent. What did it matter? One burning thought—a new thought that had come to him in the watches of the night—more and more possessed him. Ersilia was going away, and she would know nothing of his love. Did she know nothing? Once as he was silently helping her over some difficulty in the path, his eyes full of gloom met hers, and in them he seemed to see a new expression at once searching and inquiring; but she did not speak, and as he fell back to assist Mademoiselle Mathilde, she passed on in front amongst the trees with Mr. Fleming.

Humphrey, absorbed in his own thoughts, did not notice that one other of the party was almost as melancholy as himself, till presently, as they were walking along a more level space, a little grey figure came slipping up to his side. It was Charlotte, who had met with more than one disaster since the expedition set out. Her Spanish saddle had turned, and she had been thrown to the ground; she had lost a glove, and she had torn her frock in an ineffectual attempt to reach a fern that she thought her aunt would like.

“Charlotte always tears her frocks,” Miss Rose said composedly, promptly producing a neat little house-wife from her pocket, and presenting her cousin with a needle and thread.

"It is not very much torn this time," Ersilia answered, "never mind it now, Charlotte; you cannot well mend it yourself, but I will do it for you as soon as we stop."

Charlotte then, with her torn frock and her sorrowful face, came up to Humphrey, who was walking a little apart from the others.

"Mr. Fleming says that you and he are going to Argelès the same day that the Princess Zaraikine leaves," she said. "I am so sorry you are all going away."

"It is very good of you to say so," Humphrey answered, gloomily, "but these things cannot be helped, Miss Grey, and I don't know that there is much use talking about them."

"Do you think not?" she said, "but it will be so dull when you are gone. You know we do not leave till Saturday week, and I don't know what I shall do. It was very dull before we came to the Eaux-Chaudes, but since we have been here, and I have known you and the Princess Zaraikine, it has been quite different. I am very sorry you are going, and I think you are sorry, too; you look so."

"Do I?" said Humphrey, unable to help smiling, and looking down he saw a little face turned up to his with so kind and simple an expression that his gloom almost vanished for the moment.

"I *am* very sorry," he said, "but you know we shall soon be in Paris, Miss Grey, and then we shall all meet again."

"Yes, that will be nice," she said, "I am glad for that reason that we are going there for the winter."

"For no other reason? Don't you like Paris?" said Humphrey.

"Not much—not so much as Brussels. I used to have no friends in Paris, and then it was very dull," said Charlotte, in whom a capacity for enjoyment had apparently not been developed. "Now I shall like it better, but I hoped that Aunt Maria would go back to Brussels."

"You were not dull in Brussels, then?" said Humphrey.

"No, oh no!" she said, "I was very happy there last winter. I wish we could go back there again; I wish I could be as happy again, but that will never be."

"Why not?" said Humphrey, sorry for the poor little girl and her troubles. "People say that it is just when life seems dullest that the best things happen. I don't know if it is true, but so they say."

"Yes," replied Charlotte; "but it is different with me, because it is not for myself only——"

She stopped short, as though afraid of saying too much, and coloured up; and just then, hearing her name called from behind, she ran back to where the rest of the party were standing.

They had turned aside into a little sunny glade, watered by a marshy stream, and full of soft grass and flowers. Mademoiselle Mathilde had declared herself exhausted, and unable to go a step further without at least half an hour's rest. She had dismounted from her pony, and was now comfortably seated in the shade of a beech tree. Ersilia began to mend Charlotte's frock, and Rose, who had already announced more than once that she had been learning to paint, immediately, to Mr. Fleming's great amusement, produced an elaborate apparatus for water-colour drawing, sat down, and began to improve these idle moments by sketching the surrounding scenery. He stood watching her for a few minutes, and finding that she was not at all disconcerted, presently sat down beside her.

"Might I venture to make a suggestion?" he said, and very good-naturedly began to give her some elementary information. Rose listened with round eyes. "That is not at all the way my mistress taught me," she said, not without scorn, and taking up her brush again, set to work as before.

"Come with me, Humphrey," said Mr. Fleming,

getting up and laughing; "I want to find out whether there is anything to be seen of this lake. I have an idea that, as Mademoiselle Mathilde suggests, we have taken the wrong path."

And so it proved. Not a hundred yards from where they had been sitting, the trees grew thinner and the road came to an end. They had reached the edge of the forest, and before them lay a wild and pathless tract, strewn with rocks, tossed into hollows and ridges, running up on every side to meet the giant slopes of the mountains; in the midst the snow-flecked dome and sharp precipices of the Pic du Midi rising into the blue air. They were high up in the heart of the mountains, but there was no lake.

Mademoiselle Mathilde was triumphant when they returned to her with this intelligence.

"Did I not tell you so?" she said, "I knew that boy was not to be trusted; I was convinced of it. We may think ourselves lucky that he has not led us into the midst of a gang of robbers. For my own part I am delighted; I could not have gone a step further to see the finest lake in the world. Now I suppose you will all want something to eat; English people can never exist without food for more than three hours together. Where has that boy put the baskets? Ersilia—where is Ersilia? Oh,

she has gone on with Mr. Fleming to see the view. Rose, my child, tell the boy to bring the baskets here into the shade, and you and Charlotte can unpack them."

Humphrey moved away from the voices and clatter, away from the shadow of the trees to the sunlight and open space beyond. He looked round for Ersilia; he had kept aloof from her, or she had avoided him—he could hardly have told which—while they were all together in the forest; but now that he had lost the consciousness of her presence, he was seized with a feverish anxiety to speak to her, to hear her voice, to read her face, to assure himself of he knew not what. But she had walked on with Mr. Fleming, and on the hilly and broken ground they were already out of sight. A fierce and angry jealousy, that for weeks had been smouldering, only half repressed, leapt into sudden life in the lad's heart. He flung himself down upon a bank amongst the ferns and bushes, and lay sullenly plucking at the grass and wild flowers that grew around.

All at once he raised himself on one elbow and looked up. Amongst some trees that covered a little grassy ridge at no great distance, Ersilia and Mr. Fleming were slowly making their way back to the forest. They were not looking towards him as

he lay half hidden amongst the ferns, but he could see them distinctly—to his life's end he will see them, two figures amongst the slender birch-trees, against that vast sunny background of pastures, and peaks, and forests. They moved slowly along side by side, then paused; Ersilia looked up, he took her hand in his——

The earth seemed to waver, the sunshine to widen and dazzle till it wrapped away mountains and forests, and Mr. Fleming and Ersilia in one swift blaze; then all was dark and still, as Humphrey lay with his face hidden on the ground. He knew it, he had known it all along; no word, no look had escaped him—and yet he had never believed it till now.

How long he lay there he never knew, but presently he heard voices calling from the wood, then a low murmur, footsteps passing near him, and a pause. He looked, and saw Ersilia coming towards him across the little meadow that sloped downwards from the bank, then lay with his face hidden as before.

In a moment he heard the rustle of her garments, and the soft movement of her feet amongst the grass and flowers as she came and stood beside him; but he did not move.

"Humphrey," she said, in a strange, sweet voice, which yet had in it some undertone of anxiety.

He raised his head. "*I love you, Ersilia!*" he cried, in a voice which seemed to himself to resound and echo till it filled the air. He dropped his head again on his folded arms, and lay motionless. There was a long pause.

"Humphrey," she said again. There was a subtle change in her voice that chilled the lad's heart with a sudden fear. All the sweet days that they had known together swept before him and faded. He raised himself slowly, and stood leaning his back against a tree.

"Forgive me," he said, "I think I am mad."

"No, I have nothing to forgive," she said with the most heartfelt earnestness, "but I am very sorry. I cannot bear the thought of giving you pain."

There were tears in her eyes as she spoke. Humphrey hated himself for having brought them there at such a moment.

"There is no pain," he said, "or if there is, I would rather have it than be without it—it is not that. I think my love for you is what is best in me. If I am ever worth anything, it will be because I have known, and had in me the power of loving the noblest and most beautiful lady on earth. But I meant never to tell you of it—I have not in all

these weeks—I know what I must appear to you—a mere boy as you once said, and that—that Mr. Fleming—when I saw you together just now, I knew how it was——”

His words ended in a sob. He broke away before she could answer him, and by the time he joined the party under the trees, the luncheon was nearly over, and Mademoiselle Mathilde was claiming all Ersilia's attention.

Their return home was hastened by a threatening thunderstorm. The afternoon changed with the suddenness common in mountainous regions, and a flash of lightning and the distant roll of thunder warned them to depart.

“I am not in the least afraid of thunder and lightning,” said Mademoiselle Mathilde, who, in fact, was a most courageous little woman, and I believe feared nothing; “at the same time a storm in the forest will be extremely dangerous, and I should prefer living a little longer if possible; there always remains the risk of breaking our necks as we go down. Have you seen my shawl, Ersilia?—and my umbrella? Thank you, Mr. Fleming. Now, Mr. Humphrey, I depend upon you to take care of me as we return.”

Humphrey desired nothing better. He was glad that their hurried descent through the forest ren-

dered conversation impossible; once or twice he fancied that Ersilia approached him as if to speak, but he pulled his hat over his eyes and strode on. The mountains covered themselves with clouds, but the storm kept off for the moment, and they reached the upper road to the Eaux-Chaudes in safety. Here they found a carriage that had been ordered to await them at this point. They all got in, with the exception of Humphrey, who said that he preferred walking, and who accordingly made the rest of the journey on foot in the society of the little guide and the donkeys.

CHAPTER XII.

Outside.

IT was nearly dark by the time Humphrey reached the Eaux-Chaudes. Dinner was over at the hotel, and the downstairs rooms were empty. His one desire was to meet no one again that night, and he was making his way out, when he saw Mr. Fleming coming down the long hall-passage to the little reading-room at one end. There was only a dim light from a small oil-lamp, and Humphrey hoped to escape unnoticed, but Mr. Fleming saw him and stopped.

"Are you going upstairs, Humphrey?" he said.

"No," the lad answered, "I am going out to watch the storm; it seems to be coming on grandly. Good night, Sir."

"Good-night, my boy, if we don't see anything more of you." Mr. Fleming answered so kindly and cheerily that Humphrey felt persuaded he knew nothing of what had passed. A wild thought darted through his brain; he stood looking after his master for a moment, then with a sudden impulse, turned and went straight upstairs to the sitting-room.

The door was half-open and he could see into the room full of the lights and shadows of a glowing wood-fire. Ersilia was sitting in front of it alone, her cheek resting on her hand, and on her face a noble and tender expression that no words can describe. She started as Humphrey came in and walked up to the mantel-piece.

"I beg your pardon," he said with a desperate calmness, "I did not mean to disturb you, I only want to say one word, and then I am going away again. I only want to know—I have no right to ask, I daresay; but I cannot endure uncertainty—anything is better than that——"

"There need be no uncertainty," Ersilia answered very clearly and gently, looking at him the while like one who must wound, but who would also heal, "I am going to marry Mr. Fleming, if that is what you mean, Humphrey."

"Thank you," he said, "yes, that is what I meant. I knew it must be so, but I wished to be quite certain. It is very good of you to tell me." He took her hand in his, and raised it to his lips. "God bless you!" he said, and left the room.

He went outside into the grey night, the gathering storm, that best suited his mood, and walked up and down the little platform in front of the hotel. The clouds had come down and filled the

gorge above, below, and on every side, till only the little space of the village was left clear in the midst. It was as though a great curtain had been let down, shutting it out from the rest of the world. Presently the mist came lower still, into the very street, flashes of blue lightning lighted it up; ruddy gleams shone from the windows; the people were still walking, standing, chattering in their evening idleness, but Humphrey shivered, chilled to the heart. He lingered outside till the flickering fire-light in the window overhead changed to a steady glow, till a shadow passed and a curtain was drawn; then he made his way across the street to his rooms at the post-office.

A few drops of rain were falling as he entered the house, and by the time he had got upstairs and struck a light, he could hear it pelting down. He opened his window, and it came rushing in from the outer darkness; mountains and sky were alike lost in the blinding sheets of rain and mist, the thunder echoed and re-echoed in dull rolling peals. How did such a night appear, he wondered with inexpressible bitterness, by the warm glow in yonder room, that he still seemed to see faintly through the blackness? He closed the window, and sat down at the table, with his head resting on his folded arms.

No need to dwell on that vigil, on the boy's passionate longing and heart-sick despair. The wild darkness without seemed to add to the darkness within. The mists that had come down to shut out the world, seemed in like manner to have shut out from him his past and future life, leaving only the present with its desolation. What remained to him? His master? He would not think of him. His art? For months past he had had no thought, no hope, no aspiration that was not bound up with the smile of those sweet eyes, the praise of those sweet lips. It was for the moment as though through that thick darkness he were groping for his own soul that he had lost. . . .

He roused himself at last, and began to walk up and down the room. As he did so, his eye fell on an unfinished sketch that was lying in one corner; it was a view of the mountains by day-break, taken from the slope behind the house; he had intended to finish it the very next morning and give it to Ersilia before she left. The sight of it now changed the whole current of his thoughts; he began to think of the day that was coming, and of how he should meet it. He could not meet it, he said to himself—he would go away. He could not stay where he was; he could not face the old life, whose familiar details suddenly rose before him with

a sickening vividness under such altered conditions. To the young everything appears final; they have no experience of the modifying circumstances that shade off the most abrupt changes of life, and to them escape always seems easier than endurance. He would go away, Humphrey thought; he would cross the mountains into Spain, and there travel and make his own way, as many a young fellow had done before him. He would start in the early morning before anyone was up, no one should try to stop him; but he would write from his first halting-place, and say where he was and what he was going to do. Something of new courage and hope rose in his heart as he came to this resolution. He had both the egotism and the humility of youth, and it did not occur to him that any independent action of his might effect the happiness of others.

He set about his preparations at once, that he might lose no time in the morning. He had plenty of money with him for present use; he put up his passport and papers, collected his sketches and drawing-materials, packed some of his things into a knapsack that he had brought with him for mountain excursions, and the rest into a port-manteau to be sent after him. When all was ready, he would not lie down for fear of over-sleeping

himself, but drew a chair to the window to wait for the dawn. It was long past midnight; the storm was over and the mists all gone; the stars shone faintly in a grey blue sky, and a peaceful moonlight lay upon all, transforming the homely old-fashioned houses with a new beauty, as it sparkled on the wet roofs and white walls. Night after night Humphrey, leaning from his window, had looked down upon the little village wrapped round so closely by the mountains, till he knew every roof and window. Now he gazed for the last time upon the sleeping houses; the lights were all put out; only at the end of the street one oil lamp was burning. He looked across to the hotel, where rows of closed and shuttered windows blankly reflected the white moonlight. "God bless her!" he cried once more, stretching out his arms, "and him too," he added after a moment's pause, dropping his head on his hands. Something of the peace of the still night, the clear air seemed to pass into his soul; he threw himself into his chair, and tired out fell asleep.

When he awoke again, the grey light of morning was everywhere, and high up in the sky some red-tinged clouds were already floating. Humphrey had no time to lose; he went quickly about his last preparations, and then, taking up his knapsack,

crept softly down the dark wooden stairs. Early as it was, the house was already astir; the kitchen door by which he had to pass stood wide open, and some women who had come down with milk and butter from the mountain dairies were standing round the fire. They were too busy chattering, however, to notice Humphrey, and he passed out, as he hoped, unobserved.

He walked up the village street, grey and chilly in the chill morning air, across the bridge where he had once lingered with Ersilia, and so gained the winding road beyond. He walked along quickly in the brightening dawn, nor did he pause till he had reached a point where the torrent, receding for a space from the bank, left a strip of grassy shore where a saw-mill had been erected. It had often been the turning point in their evening walks, and here Humphrey too once more turned and looked back. Behind him, hidden by many a bend of the road, lay the houses of the Eaux-Chaudes, haunted for him by an inexpressible grief, by a wild, hopeless longing. He had started from an impulse that had passed without conflict into a resolution, and there was nothing to turn him from his purpose now; but many minutes passed before he took up his knapsack again, and once more went upon his way. The land lay before him all glorious in the

early morning; a land of deep blue shadows touched by the sunlight into vivid green, of misty purple mountains, of softest meadows sloping down to meet the winding road. The waterfalls dripped from the rocks; the sheep-bells tinkled far and near; shepherds passed him with their flocks, and women with girt-up skirts, walking by the side of heavily laden carts. But the lad hardly noted these things at the time, as he walked on with a bent head and a heart full of unutterable bitterness.

CHAPTER XIII.

Humphrey tries to Escape.

THE sun was already high, and the morning freshness almost gone, when Humphrey saw before him the scattered houses of the last village in France. They lie deep among the mountains, at the foot of a pine-covered slope tracked by dry water courses, and backed by lofty peaks, which the mists that had fallen in rain last night at the Eaux-Chaudes had whitened with the first snows of the season. The carriage road ends with the village, but to the left a bridle path leads immediately to the wild pass, where snow bridges span the torrent in winter, and avalanches come crashing down amongst the pines and beech-trees.

Almost the last house in the village was an unpretending hotel, and Humphrey, who had had nothing to eat that day, made his way up to it, intending to breakfast there and get some information about his route. A few stone steps on one side led up from the road to a little raised platform or terrace, on which the door of the house opened. A woman came out to meet him; a woman with a

long, melancholy face, which Humphrey somehow thought he remembered.

"So you are come at last," she said, looking at him and nodding. "Where is the *belle dame* who was with you?"

"She is not with me to-day," Humphrey answered. The woman's words had awakened a memory that came with a sudden pang. "I remember you now," he said; "you were good enough to give us places in your cart one evening."

"Yes, it was I. I thought I should see you again," said the woman; "every one comes here while the weather is fine; when the snow is down, it is another thing. Are you going to the Plateau? Do you want a guide? My son is at home and can go with you. No one knows the mountains better than my Baptiste, though he is but young; he has been with his father since he was that high. Will you have breakfast before you start? We have trout just caught, which will be ready directly. What has become of the *belle dame*? Has she gone away?"

"I am not going to the Plateau, I am going into Spain," said Humphrey, as soon as he could speak. "Can you tell me anything about the road?"

"Baptiste can go with you," answered the woman, promptly. "You had better hire one of our

mules, and Baptiste will accompany you across the frontier and return with the animal; that will be best."

Humphrey had intended making the journey on foot; but he was tired and uncertain of the distance, and would not dispute the point. He hired the mule, and ordered some breakfast; then, as they were entering the house, cheered somehow by the sight of a face not wholly strange, asked if he could have a pen and some paper. It had occurred to him that he could write from here to the Eaux-Chaudes, and send the letter by a messenger. They would thus have news of him almost before they had time to miss him, whilst he would be already far on his road. I think it was more from the wish to have the letter over than from any distinct idea that his departure might be the cause of anxiety or suspense that he came to this conclusion. If, on looking back now, he cannot wholly acquit himself of ingratitude at this time towards his master, he had no consciousness of it then. When he thought of Mr. Fleming, it was as of a man in whom the consciousness of an exquisite happiness must needs swallow up all lesser emotions; and perhaps, for the moment, he was not far wrong.

But when writing materials were brought to him in the little wooden room in which he sat waiting for his breakfast, he could not make up his mind

as to whom he should write, or what he should say. He sat pondering with his head in his hands, but the words would not come; at last, resolving to make another attempt after breakfast, he pushed the paper from him, and went out to await the making of his coffee and the frying of his trout on the little stone platform outside.

He was leaning over the low wall, looking down upon the valley, and on the road lost immediately in the ravine beyond, when he heard a cracking of whips and jingling of bells behind him, and looking round he saw a carriage come driving through the village and up to the inn door. Already, before it stopped, Humphrey had recognised Mademoiselle Mathilde's yellow bonnet on the front seat, and Rose's hat and feathers on the box by the driver, and all at once he remembered what till that moment he had entirely forgotten, that a long talked of excursion had been fixed for this very day; and there they all were, Mademoiselle Mathilde and the Princess Zaraikine, Charlotte and Rose in the carriage, and Mr. Fleming following on horseback.

Could Humphrey have escaped at that moment, he would have done so, but it was too late. The remainder of the excursion was to be performed on horseback or on foot, and the party were already

alighting from the carriage which was to remain at the inn till their return.

"If there is a decent room in the place, I shall stop here till you come back," Mademoiselle Mathilde was saying as she came up the little flight of steps, "it will be extremely dull, and the people, so far as I can make out, are little better than savages, but that cannot be helped. One must, of course, see everything that is to be seen, but it is too much to have this sort of thing two days running. No one admires fine scenery more than I do, but I like a little relief from it, I own, and I have seen and heard of nothing else for weeks. There are other things in the world than mountains and forests. I could almost wish that I had had a head-ache, and stopped in bed this morning like the excellent Mrs. Grey. Marie would have attended to me, and all would have been comfortable, whereas now—Good Heavens, Mr. Humphrey, where did you drop from?"

Humphrey who had retreated into the shadow of the doorway, came forward at these words, looking haggard and dusty enough, no doubt, in the bright streaming sunshine, and found himself confronting the whole party, Rose, Charlotte, and last of all Ersilia, who had lingered a moment to collect some of Mademoiselle Mathilde's straying properties.

She came straight up to Humphrey, looking at him with sweet, anxious eyes.

"You *are* here, Humphrey," she said, "we heard that you had been seen leaving the village at day-break this morning, and I thought we should perhaps find that you had come on here before us."

"What made you do that, my boy?" said Mr. Fleming, looking at him kindly. "You should have waited and come with us; you look as if you had tired yourself out before the day began. Have you had any breakfast? I am going to order some coffee, and we can have it together before going on further."

He went into the inn as he spoke. Mademoiselle Mathilde had already disappeared within the interior, Rose and Charlotte followed, but Humphrey walked away again to the side of the little platform leaning, as before, with folded arms on the low stone wall. Five minutes since, he had seen a vision of himself travelling along the road below, weary and forlorn indeed, but with a resolute heart, and now all at once his resolution had begun to waver, to melt away. Should he go now, at once, whilst they were all at breakfast within, without seeing them again? With a sudden feverish desire to do anything rather than wait there and meet a thousand questions for which he had no

answer, the lad raised himself and prepared to go, when, turning round, he faced Ersilia, who was standing just behind him. He gave one glance at her face and would have passed on, but she put out her hand to detain him.

"Humphrey," she said in an unsteady voice, "I cannot bear to see you so unhappy."

He looked up again. She was very pale, and her lips quivered a little as she returned the gaze. He had never before seen her so much moved, and it nearly broke his heart.

"Why did you come here?" he said, miserably, moving a pace or two away. "I meant to trouble no one—if I am unhappy, I can bear it. I forgot you were all coming here to-day; I have nothing to do with that now. I did not mean to see you again; I meant to go away—into Spain—anywhere—"

"Go away?" she said, "from us—from Mr. Fleming?"

"Yes," he answered, "I would have written from here to tell you—it will be better so——"

She did not answer at once. She stood beside him, with one hand resting on the low wall, and looking down into the valley as though she too saw a vision of a toiling, dusty Humphrey lessening before her eyes.

"Humphrey," she said at last, turning to him, and speaking very earnestly, "you must not go; I could not bear it, knowing that it is I who have done you so great an injury."

"You? an injury?" he said, flushing, "would it be an injury if one were lifted up into Heaven by some angel, and learnt that for a little space one was not quite unworthy to breathe the same air? That is what these days have been to me. It is fate and my own madness that has brought them to an end."

She was silent for a moment, and there were tears in her eyes as she answered. "That is what seems to me so sad," she said, "that these days which I had thought would leave a memory that through all our lives we should be glad to turn to again, should work you harm through me. We have been such good companions and friends. I remember long ago, when we were children and spent that day together, thinking that I should like to have a brother like you, and somehow, when I saw you again, the old wish and the old feeling came back."

"I too remember the time when we were children," Humphrey answered, "I think I loved you then—why not? You were different from any one I had ever seen before, from all the world. You

always will be—" his voice broke, he turned his head away; how could he tell her of all the love and jealousy that had been raging in his heart? "I have no right to say all this now," he went on, "and nothing can ever be again as it has been. You see it is best for me to go away; why should you wish to stop me?"

"Because I cannot think it best that you should leave your work and Mr. Fleming," she said earnestly. "Perhaps I have no right to urge you— You must forgive me, Humphrey, but—since I have known you, I have thought so much of your future, of what you might and ought to make it. I think there is no nobler work than that which through pure and lofty beauty lifts men to nobler thoughts, and I liked to think there was some one belonging to me to whom the power to do such work was given."

"I thought you would not care now—" the lad said, half choking as he spoke; and then ashamed, perhaps, of the boyish speech, he went on quickly, "I am not going to give my work up, I can go on studying wherever I am."

"But not with Mr. Fleming," answered Ersilia. "I think, Humphrey, it would be better that I had never known you than that I should come between you and Mr. Fleming. You love him and he loves

you. I heard him say once that to have such a pupil as you are, and such as you promise to be in the future, was almost like having a second life before him to live through. You will not disappoint him by going away now?"

She laid her hand on his arm as she spoke; her eyes looked at him entreatingly, her voice seemed to float and linger in his ears. What could he do?

"I will not go," he said, "you don't know what you are asking of me, but I will not go," and then, all at once, he knew that he had never meant to go, from the very first moment that she had asked him to stay.

CHAPTER XIV.

Return.

It was on a bright afternoon, towards the end of October that Humphrey first saw Ersilia again. She had been four days in Paris and he had already called twice without seeing her; but being told by Mr. Fleming that she would certainly be at home this afternoon, he started to make a third attempt.

The apartment occupied by the Princess Zarai-kine was in a house that had belonged to Monsieur de Florian, and which many years ago, during the life time of his parents, had been entirely inhabited by members of his own family. But these were long since dead or dispersed, and Monsieur de Florian, living chiefly abroad, had reserved for himself only the first floor, letting the remainder in apartments. It was a big old house in the Rue—— near the upper end of the Chaussée d'Antin, standing amongst other houses that had a newer and fresher air than itself. (It no longer exists—only the other day I witnessed its overthrow and disappearance before modern improvement.) The great *porte-cochère* led into a lofty, dark, unevenly paved passage running beneath the front of the house to

the court-yard beyond. At the entrance a clatter of voices might be heard from behind the red-curtained glass door of the porter's lodge; at the other end, a wide staircase with dimly polished steps and a heavy balustrade led upwards through the house. On the first landing, two entrance-doors faced each other on either side of the window looking on to the court-yard, and led respectively to the apartments occupied by the Princess Zaraikine and by Mademoiselle de Brisac.

Ersilia was at home, and Humphrey was shown into a large, dim salon full of worn and faded furniture. M. de Florian had cared too little for his Paris home to spend much money on its adornment, and the chairs and tables dated probably from the time of his own marriage, some forty years before. Only a wood-fire blazing on the wide hearth and shining in tall narrow mirrors set in recesses round the room, and the lights reflected from the gold backgrounds of one or two pictures by early Italian painters on the walls, made a sudden brightness here and there. A door at one end stood open and showed the dining-room beyond, a cheerful room panelled with light oak and full of afternoon sunshine, a glass cupboard with china in one corner, and large windows looking out upon the yellowing trees waving in the courtyard.

Another door opened, and Ersilia was in the room, her hands held out in sweet and cordial welcome.

"I was sorry to miss you when you called before, Humphrey," she said, "but I have been almost constantly out since our return to Paris. Aunt Mathilde has been refurnishing her apartment—you know she has her own rooms on the other side of the house—and that has given us a great deal to do. It was very good of you to come so soon."

"It has seemed a long time to me," he answered.

She looked at him with an expression, half anxious, half wistful, in her eyes, before which his own sank. Who was he, the lad had asked himself many times during these last few weeks, that through his rashness and want of self-command he should have been the cause of one moments' uneasiness or pain to this sweet lady?

"Let us come into the library," she said, "I have been working there all day; it is the room I like best to sit in. Old Lebrun is there, he came from La Chênaie this morning; but we have just finished our business together, and he will be gone directly."

Humphrey followed her into the adjoining room.

A fire was burning here also, but the window was open, letting in the fresh afternoon air, and an echo, as it were, of the departed summer in the vague street noises. There were some late roses, a tall china jar, and a litter of leaves and petals on a little table near the window, and Ersilia's embroidery frame stood in a corner by the fire; but it was a room of books and bronzes and marbles. Round the upper part of the walls, beneath the ceiling, ran a broad shelf on which were arranged busts, alternating with antique helmets and jars of red and black pottery; below, bookcases lined two sides of the room and filled the recesses on either side of the window, and here and there, on a bracket or stand, some object of special value stood out in dark or pale relief against the dull green walls. There were some framed drawings above the mantel-piece; a leather table covered with books and papers stood in front of the window, and an open bureau on one side of the fire place.

A small shrewd-looking old man with white hair and keen black eyes was seated at the table tying up papers. He rose as Ersilia came in, buttoned up his coat, and stood waiting with his hat in his hand, as though ready to depart.

"You are in a hurry to go, Lebrun," said Ersilia, "and I will not detain you longer. I think I have

said all that is necessary, and you will let me know how the work goes on, and whether the families Guérin and Dubois are satisfied with their new cottages."

"Madame should receive constant reports," the old man said bowing.

"I hope to be at La Chênaie again early in the new year," Ersilia went on, "by that time no doubt everything will be completed. And you are not to forget," she said, smiling, "that you are to allow me to begin my new library in the spring."

"I, Madame? What have I to do with it? Madame may build a hundred libraries if she likes; there is money enough for everything, if that were all. I know nothing about books, and heads, and pictures," with a disdainful glance round the room, "but I know where an ear of corn is the fullest, and when a man makes a wry face without any tears behind it, and that is my notion of managing an estate. There is money enough, but if we are to have schools, and lectures, and a hundred things that no one ever heard of before, and the people don't like them, and Monsieur le Curé takes to preaching against them, things will not go very smoothly."

"My good Lebrun, I am afraid of nobody's preaching but your own," answered Ersilia, unable

to help laughing, "Monsieur le Curé, I am sure, will interfere with nothing that I may wish to do."

"Madame has won everyone's heart, and can do what she pleases, I know that very well," answered Lebrun, shrugging his shoulders, "the people have been as happy as possible hitherto in living and dying as their fathers did before them, but if Madame thinks she can make them any happier, there is nothing more to be said." He gathered up his papers, and still shrugging his shoulders, left the room.

"Has the fever quite disappeared?" said Humphrey.

"I hope so, there have been no new cases for a fortnight," said Ersilia. "I hope there is no danger of its reappearing. A pond at the lower end of the village is being drained, and two of the cottages have been pulled down, but there are others that only want repairing, and I am glad of that, for the people are attached to their old homes."

It was not till long afterwards that Humphrey learned that immediately on her arrival at La Chênaie, Ersilia had turned the château into a hospital, and with the aid of a *sœur de charité* had herself watched and tended the sick people day and night.

"Sit down, Humphrey," she said, presently, "whilst I finish arranging my flowers. They came from La Chênaie this morning. We have quantities of roses in the garden there, and Lebrun brought me a great basketful. He is a kind old man at heart, and always likes to do what he thinks will give me pleasure, though he has such a love of contradiction that he cannot help in the first instance opposing anything that is proposed."

She talked on as though to cover Humphrey's silence, for he had hardly spoken since he came, and stood now leaning against the mantelpiece watching Ersilia with her roses. She was thinner, he thought, than when he had last seen her; her cheeks were always pale, and she was tired now with a long morning's work, but yet he felt that some nameless change had passed over her, giving new depth and meaning to her beauty—the mystery of a hidden joy seemed to be held in the depths of her grey eyes, to rest on the pure and tender curves of her sweet lips.

He roused himself at last, however, and with an instinctive avoidance of anything personal, "That is a fine cast," he said. "Were all these casts and bronzes collected by M. de Florian?"

"Yes," Ersilia answered, "he purchased most of these many years ago; they are amongst my

early childish recollections in the days when I used to come to Paris for a month or two every year. That is why I like this room so much. My uncle always sat here, and liked to have me with him. I used to learn my lessons and bring my dolls in here. That helmet he brought with him from Marathon, one year that we were in Greece together," she added, going up to where Humphrey was standing; "he had a separate memory attached to each."

"And these are the things that you wish to place in your new library at La Chênaie?" said Humphrey.

"These and some others which are still in the packing-cases in which they came from Rome; also some old china and pictures which are already at La Chênaie. It was the dream of my uncle's life," she said, "to collect all his scattered collections into one museum; all his purchases were made to that end, but he died without having even begun it."

"That is dreadful," said Humphrey; "it must be so terribly sad for a man to see his life slip from him without his having accomplished what he most cared for."

"I don't think my uncle felt it so," she answered; "his was a very happy life, and this unful-

filled intention gave it a meaning and completed it. His real happiness lay in selecting and buying, and he would not have been content to do this without some ultimate object in view. But the practical carrying out of his scheme would have given him more trouble than pleasure, and, in fact, he constantly put it off till it was too late."

"But that is what seems to me so dreadful," said Humphrey. "There is something pitiful in a life so missing its highest aim, in being so resultless—long years of working to no end."

"Can one judge of a life in that way?" said Ersilia, flushing up with some displeasure perhaps. "My uncle's life was one amongst others—everyone could not be so, and it would not satisfy everyone; but I have always thought there was something very beautiful in his genuine love for beautiful things, and his perfect knowledge and judgment in such matters. And he always looked upon what he was doing as a means of ultimate good to others: if he deceived himself it was unconsciously. He had a rare simplicity of character."

"I beg your pardon," said Humphrey, "I did not know what I was talking about. I am always blundering out stupid opinions that are worth nothing when one comes to look at them, and now I have vexed you."

"Not at all," she answered, cordially; "I think your opinions are worth a great deal, and I dare say you are right in the abstract. I cannot judge of my uncle as I should of anyone else, I loved him too well. Perhaps, too, I was talking as much to myself as to you. Sometimes, you know, a chance word strikes into an old argument that one has fought out more than once, and then one cannot help fighting it out once more. Let us talk of something else. How does your picture get on?"

They were together and talking as in the summer days in the Pyrenees; a thrill of pleasure came over the lad, and his embarrassed self-consciousness passed away.

"My old picture?" he said. "That was no good at all. I saw that as soon as I came back. I have begun a new one; stay, I will show you the sketch."

He took a sketch book from his pocket, and began turning it over.

"The subject is from Dante," he said, "it is where he sees Matilda gathering flowers beyond the stream in the forest. Mr. Fleming thinks the composition good."

"I like it very much too," said Ersilia, considering it, "but ought the ground to be covered

with these autumn crocuses, Humphrey? I think they are spring flowers that are mentioned."

"I know," he answered, getting suddenly red, "that is only the first sketch, as it came into my head. It was that day in the forest. I was walking in front with Mademoiselle Mathilde, and I turned round, and saw you coming through the trees with your gown gathered up, and your hand full of flowers, and that gave me the first idea."

She sat musing for a while with the sketch-book open before her, then turning to the lad, "I want you to do me a kindness if you will, Humphrey," she said.

"Of course I will," he answered, "what is it?"

"It is this; I have a crayon sketch of my uncle when he was a young man; I have also a very much smaller one done by an artist friend of his shortly before his death, and I want an enlarged copy of this one to match the other which hangs in my dressing-room. Would you undertake to do it for me?"

"I will do my best," he answered in a low voice. "Thank you." He took the proposition as he felt sure it was meant—as an act of oblivion and friendship. "I have forgotten your past folly," her kind voice and words seem to say, "we are friends and companions again as before; it rests

with you that we remain so henceforward." She could not know that it was a cruel kindness, and that it had been better for him perhaps if a thousand miles had lain between them.

She began looking through a portfolio for the sketch.

"Here are some designs that Mr. Fleming has been making for my new library," she said, handing Humphrey some sheets of paper, "it will be lighted from above, you see; there will be book-cases to the right and left probably, and pictures at the further end. I do not see this drawing of which I was speaking, I think I must have left it in the next room. We will go and look."

She led the way into the drawing-room, and Humphrey followed her; but it was not destined that the drawing should be found at that time, for as they entered at one door, Mrs. Grey and Charlotte came in at another.

CHAPTER XV.

A Beginning of Trouble.

MRS. GREY came in affable and dignified as ever, in a violet silk gown that seemed to illuminate the room. This lady's dresses which were always perfectly fashionable and well made, rustled so much, and had so many flounces and trimmings, that she was apt to give one the impression of having on two or three gowns at once. Charlotte came slipping after, blushing and wide-eyed, looking just as she used to do at the Eaux-Chaudes. She was nearly swept away in her aunt's impressive entrance, and would have at once retreated to the chair nearest the door, but Ersilia kissed her, and took her hands in hers. "I am glad to see you again, my dear," she said, and still holding the little hand, she made the girl sit down by her on the sofa.

"This is a very great pleasure," Mrs. Grey said, as she seated herself, "I am so delighted to see you again, Princess, and Mr. Randolph too; it is almost like one of our pleasant meetings in the Pyrenees. I heard of your return to Paris only

yesterday, and I said at once to Rose, that I should make a point of calling upon you to-day."

"You are very good," answered Ersilia, with the perfect simplicity of manner that used to baffle Mrs. Grey at the Eaux-Chaudes. "Your little girl is quite well, I hope?"

"She is quite well; thank you, but constantly occupied with her studies. I am anxious that she should have every advantage that Paris can afford. She is at a drawing class this afternoon; her master was quite struck with the sketches she made in the Pyrenees; he says they are something quite remarkable for a young girl of her age. It may be foolish, but I own that I have an intense desire, I might almost say a longing, with which I am sure you artistic people will sympathise, to see my only child an artist—not professional, of course not professional—but an—an artist in short. I shall give her every opportunity of studying in these young days. Do you not think I am right, Princess?"

"I think," answered Ersilia, "if she has any real talent, it would be a great pity not to cultivate it."

"I am glad you agree with me. That is what I myself think—where there is talent, it should be cultivated. There are some young people, you know," with a glance at Charlotte, "who are so in-

different that it is impossible to do anything with them; but that is not the case with Rose—she is most industrious. I shall take her frequently to the Louvre. Mr. Randolph, you and I must arrange to go to the Louvre together some day; I should learn much from your experience, I am sure. And that reminds me to inquire whether Mr. Fleming has given up receiving on Sunday afternoons? I called at his studio last Sunday, but he was out.”

“He has for the present,” answered Humphrey, “he is very much occupied. I don’t know if he intends to begin it again later.”

“I quite long to see your picture again,” said Mrs. Grey, “I remember thinking it quite—quite remarkable, if you will allow me to say so; have you sold it yet?”

“No,” said Humphrey, bluntly, “I have painted it out.”

“Painted it out!—painted over it, do you mean? My dear Mr. Randolph! But that is the very prodigality of genius; is it not, Princess?”

“I think it was very foolish,” said Ersilia smiling, “what made you do that, Humphrey?”

“I hated the very sight of the thing,” he answered, “and I rubbed it all over one day. The canvas will do for something else.”

“Was that the picture with the red sky?” Char-

lotte said timidly, as her aunt went on talking to Ersilia. "I liked that picture, Mr. Randolph."

"Did you?" he answered, "then I am sorry I destroyed it—at least no, I am not sorry, for you ought not to like anything so bad."

"I never can understand anything about pictures," said Charlotte rather ruefully. "Aunt Maria knows so much about them, and is so fond of them, and I never can care about them as she does."

"I am delighted to hear it," answered Humphrey with great sincerity, "then we can talk of something else. What did you do after we left the Eaux-Chaudes? Did you go anywhere else?"

"No, we came straight back to Paris; you know we had been everywhere before. It was very dull after you left, Mr. Randolph, as I knew it would be. I wish that you could have stayed, or that we could all have gone somewhere together."

"We did not go very far," said Humphrey, smiling, "Mr. Fleming was obliged to return to Paris sooner than he expected, so we did not see much of the Pyrenees after all."

"You did not see much," cried Mrs. Grey, who had the faculty of hearing and talking at the same time, "that was really a pity, Mr. Randolph. I am happy to say that we were able to do a great deal

—not to go *everywhere*, of course—but still to do a great deal. For my own part, I should have liked to explore every nook and corner had that been possible, but the Pyrenees are of such very great extent.”

“I don’t know that I should care to do that if it were possible,” said Humphrey, “I always like to leave something for another time. Half the charm of a place is gone for me when I know it thoroughly. Don’t you know what I mean?” he said, turning to Ersilia. “If I am in a wood, I never care to walk straight through to the other side; I like to imagine that it extends indefinitely and that I might go on losing my way in it for ever.”

“Yes, I understand,” she answered, “but I am not sure that I agree with you. I like to know all that is within my reach, though I also like to feel that there is a beyond that I do not know. I should have been glad to see more of the Pyrenees, but, as you know,” she said, turning to Mrs. Grey, “we went there in the first instance on account of my aunt’s health, and had to leave suddenly at last.”

“I know—most sad. That excellent Mademoiselle de Brisac! I was so sorry to hear that she is out to-day, but I hope to see her before long. She is the most charming person—a little abrupt

at times, perhaps, but with something quite—quite charming about her. You are not going, Mr. Randolph,” as Humphrey rose and took up his hat, “I have a hundred things to say to you—if I could only recollect—”

“I am very sorry,” he answered, “but I must go, I have an engagement at five o’clock.”

“Well, we shall soon meet again, I have no doubt. Shall I see you at the Embassy to-night? Are you going to Lady C——’s next Thursday? Do not forget that my At Homes begin on Wednesday fortnight; I shall hope often to see you. I do not know whether it is the same with you, Princess, but I find that, though the season has not yet begun, my engagements are quite numberless.”

Humphrey walked away from his cousin’s house with mixed feelings, that he did not care to analyse. It seemed enough for the moment that his old friendly relations with Ersilia were resumed. The old days were to begin again then, with all their old sweetness and bitterness? Well, better so, he thought, than to be estranged from her, to be banished from her presence, to be treated with coldness and scorn. Does the man fevered with thirst push from him the offered cup because it is half empty? Not though he knows the insufficient draught may urge his thirst to madness.

The lad's engagement was to dine with a friend, and go to the theatre afterwards. The play was dull, and they came away before it was finished, and Humphrey, who had left a sketch-book of which he was in want at his master's studio, went round there to fetch it before going home.

The studio, as he expected, was still lighted up, for Mr. Fleming was in the habit of working late, and he found him there now, hunting through a pile of dusty portfolios.

"I was just wishing for you, Humphrey," he said, "are you in a hurry or can you help me? I want to find some studies of olive trees that I have somewhere, I know, but I cannot lay my hand upon them."

"I saw them the other day," said Humphrey, "they were in one of these drawers, I think; I will look."

He went up to a black and gold cabinet, fitted with shallow drawers which he began to turn out. As he replaced the drawings again, one by one, he said, half-laughing, "I saw Mrs. Grey to-day, Sir. She wanted to know when you would be at home on Sunday afternoons again."

"Yes, your cousin told me she had been calling," said Mr. Fleming, stooping preoccupied over his portfolios.

"Have you seen her since the morning?" asked Humphrey, half wondering.

"Yes, I have been spending the evening there." Then standing up and laughing, "Mademoiselle de Brisac was in despair at not having seen you to-day, Humphrey," he went on. "'That good, that excellent young man,' she said, 'I have missed him extremely. Tell him to come and see me constantly; I have had no one to laugh at or to laugh at me since we were all together. Tell him to come in his oldest coat, and not to cut his hair unless he likes.'"

Humphrey did not answer, he had turned away at the beginning of Mr. Fleming's speech with a sudden jealous pang. It so happened that this was the first time since her return to Paris that Mr. Fleming had spent the evening with Ersilia; it was perfectly natural that he should have done so now, that he should constantly do so in the future, but somehow Humphrey had never thought of it. He had fancied that the old days, with their constant intercourse, their sweet familiarity could begin again. A vision of long days and evenings in which he could have no part rose before him. He went on looking at the drawings without seeing them.

"Stop, there they are," said Mr. Fleming, "those

on the grey paper that you have in your hand. Thank you, my boy, just pin them on to that board will you? and turn the picture round to the light. I want to work at it to-night, for I shall be busy to-morrow."

Humphrey did as he was requested, whilst Mr. Fleming took an empty canvas from where it was leaning with a number of others against the wall, and set it up upon an easel.

"Come as early as you can to-morrow morning, Humphrey," he said, "I have sent word to Giuseppe to be here at nine instead of eleven. Your cousin is coming to sit to me in the afternoon, I hope."

"Are you going to paint her portrait, Sir?"

"Yes," said Mr. Fleming, stepping back from the easel and considering the canvas. "By the by, there is a drawing for you there, Humphrey, that she asked me to bring you; she says she told you about it."

"I know," answered the lad. "She wants an enlarged copy."

"The other drawing is there also, that you may see the required size. If you have any difficulty with it, let me know, and I will help you. It would be a pity not to preserve the likeness exactly, and

that sort of *débonnaire* expression is not so easy to catch as a more decided one."

"Thank you, Sir, but I would rather do it myself, if I can," answered Humphrey jealously, "I will take it home with me, it will do for evening work."

"Just as you like, but don't sit up working too late at night, my boy, and be here early to-morrow morning."

Humphrey had a long walk before him. On his first arrival in Paris, there had been no room vacant in the house in which Mr. Fleming occupied a small apartment, nor could he find anything in that neighbourhood to suit his limited means. But he presently heard from a fellow-artist, of a room in the Rue de Seine, and though the distance from the studio was inconvenient, the boy, who was new to Paris, enjoyed his daily walks across the river, and liked his new quarters, which were so much nearer the old city (there was an old city in those days) than the Rue de Clichy. Paris was new to him—sometimes, even now, when in the early summer dawn, he sees the sky flush behind the domes and towers, and the light begins to flow along the river and the bridges and the silent spaces of the great city, when on some blazing noonday, he crosses the Place du Carrousel and turns into the Louvre, when

he lingers on the quays over some old book-stall, or stands for a moment to gaze on the sparkling view where, from amongst roofs and trees and spires, the towers of Notre Dame rise to form the centre of one of the most admirable pictures in the world, sometimes, I say, among these and a hundred other scenes, familiar to him now through the varied experiences of five-and-twenty years, some sound, some passing breath of air, some merest sensation reveals again the days when they were still new to him, when, before a slim lad, life and art, youth and love seemed to roll themselves out immeasurably.

Humphrey, then, who spent his days for the most part at his master's studio, found no fault with the situation of the room which he had now occupied for nearly a twelvemonth, though it was at the very top of a lofty house standing at the corner of a narrow cross street. It was a house full of lodgers of every degree, and, as on this evening the lad was mounting the last flight of ill-lighted stairs that led from one dingy landing to another, he saw before him a thin, white-haired man, of middle height, who appeared to walk with difficulty, and whose halting steps obliged Humphrey to check his own more rapid ones. There was nothing very remarkable in the man's appearance, but Hum-

phrey had hitherto, with the exception of a little old *ouvrière*, been the sole occupant of the upper story, and he began to speculate now on the possibility of this stranger being a visitor to himself, even at this late hour of the night.

He was not left long in doubt. The man, who looked like a gentleman, though he was shabbily dressed, turned to the left on reaching the top landing, and taking a key from his pocket, began to fit it into a door facing that which led into Humphrey's room on the right. He was awkward apparently, or perhaps unable to see well in the dim lamp-light, for, after fumbling at the lock for a moment, the key fell to the ground. He was stooping with an effort to pick it up, when Humphrey, who had been pausing at his own door, crossed the landing and came to his assistance.

"Can I help you?" he said in French.

The stranger turned and looked at the lad, then lifted his hat with a perfectly courteous and unembarrassed air. "Thank you," he said, "I shall be much obliged to you. This lock is rather stiff, and I am a martyr to rheumatic gout."

Humphrey turned the key, and opened the door; he had a momentary glimpse of a firelit room, with a screen drawn across the middle; then

the stranger passed in, bowed once more, and the door was closed.

It is in the nature of things that some of the most momentous introductions of our lives should be accomplished without emphasis, only to be remembered—if remembered at all—when after events have given them significance. This was Randolph's first meeting with a man who was to be a strong influence in his life of those days, and one stronger still on the destinies of those dearest to him; but at the time he saw nothing in it but the merest passing courtesy, which, preoccupied with his own troubles, he had already forgotten by the time he had opened his own door and entered his apartment.

It was a large bare room with sloping walls. A table littered with drawings, an easel, a heap of books piled together, and a bed in a recess were amongst the principal articles of furniture; the lad's tastes were simple, nor, indeed, had he in any case, much money to spend in luxuries. But—*qu'on est bien à vingt ans, &c.*—Humphrey desired no better accommodation, and the gloom on his face as he entered his room to-night, had nothing to do with the uninviting aspect of bare walls and an unpolished floor.

He lighted his lamp and made up his fire, for, late as it was, he intended to work, then unrolling the drawings Ersilia had sent him, he began at once to prepare a sheet of paper of the requisite size. But when it was ready, and he had set to work, he found that he could not draw a line to any purpose. All the events of the day rolled themselves out before him once more. Voices and words and looks that during the last few weeks had seemed to be fading into echoes from a past already remote, for it was separated from him by a catastrophe, were once more present and ringing in his ears. He sat brooding over his drawing for a while, then threw down his pencil, and walked with impatient steps to the window.

It was a clear night. A thousand stars glittered in a dark sky above the thousand chimney pots and roofs that spread themselves below; here and there a light, late as Humphrey's own, glimmered in some window, but, for the most part, all was dark and silent—the unresting silence of a great city. That sense of a universal life breathing and sentient around which to the young is like a mighty pulse beating in unison with the bound of their own impetuous blood, set Humphrey's heart throbbing now as it had done many a time before; but it brought with it to-night a new pain, a contrasted sense, as

it were, of his own individuality, too acute to be borne. He put his hands to his head, and turned abruptly away. "I am a fool," he cried, "a fool, a fool! Why did she ask me to return?"

It might, in fact, have been better if Ersilia, in her inexperience and noble self-reproach, had not on that sunny morning amongst the mountains urged Humphrey to return home. His first impulse which had been not unmixed with manly resolution, had been a wise one, though he had shown little wisdom in acting on it. It would have been better for him to break away from everything associated with his dream of passion and mad jealousy. Left alone with Mr. Fleming after Ersilia's departure for La Chênaie, better thoughts had, indeed, made themselves felt. His master's complete unconsciousness of all that had been passing in his mind, the return to their old familiar habits of intercourse, the change of scene, all had helped to arouse in him a generous sympathy with Mr. Fleming's happiness, which showed itself in an extraordinary goodness and kindness to himself, to stir in him a longing to become worthier of the affection so freely given him by the two people he most revered on earth. "Who was he," he said again and again, with an enthusiasm and humility that he is glad to remember now, "who was he that he should be per-

mitted even to approach two souls such as these, who, in their differing strength and greatness and genius, seemed to have grown apart in the world, to meet at last and form a perfect whole?"

Such were the better thoughts which, could the lad have left behind him for a time old ties and associations, would, I think, have presently prevailed. But to maintain a changed thought amidst unchanged surroundings is, as we all know, one of the hardest struggles in life—harder, perhaps, than its converse. All that had gone to make the intensest life Humphrey had ever known, had returned to him with Ersilia, and now already on this first evening after he had seen her, the old passion and bitterness seemed rising again with redoubled force after their brief lull. One of the hardest struggles in life, I say again, to youth and inexperience, is the adjustment of the mind, unassisted by outward change, to new conditions in which it has henceforth to live. When familiar voices and familiar phrases sound in our ears, when familiar faces smile upon us, it is inevitable that we should slip back to our former habits of thought, and it is the obligation laid upon us to recover ourselves again and again from these, to realize that between us and them lies a gulph impassable as death, that results in the terrible wrestling in which victory is certain

only when we see our keenest hopes and passions dead for ever at our feet.

It was upon such a struggle as this that Randolph was entering. As he writes now, the boy's conflicts and darkness and despair seem to rise again and touch his heart with something of their old anguish. He will pass over them so far as may be in silence. They are but the ashes of a passion that was to burn fiercely for a while, and then to lose itself, as he likes to think, in a nobler and more unselfish love.

CHAPTER XVI.

Golden Hours.

MR. FLEMING and Ersilia were not to be married till the early spring. Ersilia, who had promised to spend the winter with Mademoiselle Mathilde, would not now leave the old lady to a loneliness that she would feel on her first return to Paris after years of absence. By the end of a few months she would, it might be hoped, be so far accustomed to her new life, which indeed was the one most congenial to her, as to feel reconciled to the loss of Ersilia, on whose sweet helpfulness she had learned to depend in a hundred ways. In the meantime the engagement was hardly known, for Ersilia had few personal friends, and Mademoiselle Mathilde, who could not bear the thought of the coming separation, always tried to ignore it as much as possible.

It was in the days that followed that the Princess Zaraikine's portrait, of which mention has more than once been made, was painted, and the four or five people who had so often been together

in the Pyrenees, not unfrequently met again in Mr. Fleming's studio. Humphrey of course was there, and Charlotte often accompanied Ersilia, for the girl, who had skilful fingers for all kinds of needlework, liked to bring her sewing or embroidery and sit stitching silently in a corner whilst the painting was going on. Later in the afternoon Mademoiselle Mathilde would appear, and occasionally Mrs. Grey herself would come sweeping in to bear away the reluctant Charlotte. Mrs. Grey in Paris was not indeed altogether the same as Mrs. Grey at the Eaux-Chaudes. Her engagements were so numerous that, as she explained, it was only a few minutes she could find to bestow upon us in the studio; but though comparatively haughty, she had yet not forgotten how to be affable. She invariably reminded Humphrey that they were to spend a day together at the Louvre; with Ersilia she conversed of the fashionable world, whilst her remarks on Mr. Fleming's pictures at once exasperated him and made him happy for the remainder of the day.

"I delight in symbolism," she used to say, "I think all art should be symbolic, Mr. Fleming; it should appeal through the eye to the higher sensibilities. That is what always charms me in your pictures; they are so—so ideal; there is nothing realistic about them. This for instance, appears to

me perfect, quite perfect, except—might I venture to make one very small critical remark? Hypercritical you will perhaps term it, but—this violin; are you sure that violins were invented at that period? I had fancied that they were of later date.”

“Turn the pictures to the wall, Humphrey,” Mr. Fleming would say when Mrs. Grey was gone, “I am glad they have no ears to hear with, poor things; how they would suffer if they had!”

Mrs. Grey, however, did not often appear, and these November afternoons passed one like another. Mr. Fleming and Ersilia talked, Humphrey worked silently at his easel, and perhaps—for the lad as I have said, was of a silent nature—no one guessed that he was absorbed in anything but the picture before him. Sometimes, in an interval of rest, Ersilia would correct the proof sheets of her volume of MSS. now passing through the press, or Charlotte sing one of her clear-voiced little songs. Then, as the early dusk fell, and Mr. Fleming and Humphrey laid aside their brushes, Ersilia would go to the piano and play in the firelight, a clatter of cups and saucers would be heard, and old Marguerite the cook, wondering but gracious over these unusual proceedings, would enter with a tea-tray. As Randolph looks up now, he seems to see it all

again—Ersilia smiling and pouring out tea at the little table set near the window, Mr. Fleming standing in front of his easel considering his afternoon's work, Charlotte flitting about with the pretty yellow hair that Humphrey once persuaded her to let him paint for the head of an angel, who still soars on an old canvas in yonder corner. It is hours such as these that leave golden memories in the lives of happy people—memories of happy voices and sweet laughter that ring down the long years as the fire brightens and the night looks blackly in at the window, of opening doors that admit best-loved faces, of clasping hands, and eyes that meet to read each other's thoughts. If to Randolph that time brought with it a pain from which he presently broke away, yet it is with a thrill as from vanished bliss that he recalls it now. For some happiness there is, which, only to witness, seems to make life fuller and wider, the mere remembrance of which stays with us, like the scent of flowers we have known in our childhood, a hint of infinite possibilities. Such, I think, is the happiness of a noble soul that finds its chief good in submission to a genius and experience that it feels to be higher than its own, of a sensitive and impressionable nature filled with the joy of a sweet and cheerful steadfastness unknown to itself. Randolph

likes to remember Ersilia as she was in those days when every hour brought some new experience to give new meaning and beauty to her life. He likes to remember Ersilia, but he finds it hard to write of Mr. Fleming even now. Once only in that lonely life, averse to common joys, ruled by the alternating rapture and despair of imagination, once only, perhaps, there dawned an exquisite reality—to pass again into a darkness whose intensity was measured by that of the lost delight.

There was a less ideal happiness which it might have cheered Humphrey to contemplate, had he been capable at this time of receiving any such consolation. Setting aside Ersilia's approaching marriage, Mademoiselle Mathilde was in a state of radiant satisfaction. M. de Florian had left her a handsome legacy and the use of an apartment in his Paris house, and the old lady, who had had but a small fortune of her own, was better off now than she had ever been in her life before. She had acceded more or less willingly to her brother-in-law's earnest request that she would live with him in Rome, when Ersilia, as a young girl, had returned to seek his protection; but she had naturally longed for a home of her own, and now, although she and Ersilia still lived together, she had her apartment on the other side of the courtyard, in which to

receive company and give parties after her own fashion. Already she was making preparations for the coming winter, renewing old friendships, seeking out half-forgotten acquaintance, refurnishing her rooms, of which the furniture, like Ersilia's, was worn and old-fashioned—a fact to which, unlike Ersilia, Mademoiselle Mathilde was by no means indifferent. It was generally after some shopping expedition that she made her appearance in the studio, and she used to come up from the carriage laden with parcels of every size and description, teacups and rugs, foot-stools and screens, patterns of chintz, and silk, and damask, on each and all of which she was anxious to have an opinion. By the middle of December everything was to be ready, and the rooms opened for her first party.

“I could wish,” she used to say, “to revive some of the glories of the old *salons*, the traditions even of which are almost lost in these days. I flatter myself that I am not without some of the qualities indispensable for such an enterprise, that I have the art of collecting around me people of talent and *esprit*, and that I possess the real secret of setting everyone at his ease, by making others converse without saying more than enough myself. You, Ersilia, I expect to be invaluable to me. Your conversation is not all that I could wish; on the few

occasions that we were together in society at Rome I remarked that you would sometimes sit almost silent till some subject arose that interested you, and that then you would talk as if there were nothing else worth thinking of in the world. A graceful and general interest in every topic, however trivial, is what is required, not an absorbing and exclusive interest in one. But this need not distress you, my dear child, for you have a way of looking and moving like no one else, that is enough for one person, and I can keep the conversation in my own hands. It is all I am good for in these days, but to talk well is an accomplishment that every one does not possess. That excellent Mrs. Grey, she is a delightful person in every respect, and I have no doubt imagines that her conversation is charming, but she has not an idea of what conversation really means. She thinks of what she is saying instead of what she is talking about, and shows that she does, which is worse. Mr. Humphrey, you may come to my parties if you will talk, but you have grown more silent than ever lately, and as I have often said, I will have no glum Englishmen in my rooms standing in corners and blocking up the doorways."

"I will do my best, Mademoiselle," Humphrey answered, trying to rouse himself, "but I would

rather find out your secret for making other people talk; it must save one a great deal of trouble."

"There you are wrong; it is extremely difficult, but it is not the business of a young man like you," answered Mademoiselle Mathilde, "if everybody did that we should be no further on than we were before. You have to respond to other people's attention and not look bored when you are spoken to. You may come, and I have told Mrs. Grey that she is to bring little Charlotte. Where is the child? Oh, I remember, the *bonne* fetched her half-an-hour ago. Yes, she may come; she is improved lately, it is the air of Paris, I suppose. She looks more alive and ties her bows straighter. And that reminds me, Mr. Humphrey, a new coat, I beg of you; not that old one you are cleaning your palette in."

"It is a very good coat," said the lad giving the sleeve a rub. He had a real liking, philosophical or otherwise, for old clothes, and a contempt that was not all affectation for every description of finery. "But I won't come in it to your parties, Mademoiselle," he went on, "I promise to try and look my very best on those occasions."

"And your best is not at all bad," answered Mademoiselle Mathilde, nodding, as she prepared to leave the room, "you are coming with me, are

you not, Ersilia? I want to call at a hundred places on our way home. I must order a new flower-stand, and I want your opinion on the colour of the drawing-room curtains by lamplight——”

Mademoiselle Mathilde was right in what she had said about Charlotte. Humphrey, painting silently in his corner, noticed that some change, hard to define, had come over the girl. She was still a very simple and foolish little Charlotte with not much to say for herself, and more timid than ever; any sudden voice, or opening door would make her start, and blush and tremble. But there was more purpose and animation about her; she laughed and talked more freely; her ready tears had almost ceased to flow; one would have said that in the dull imprisoning limits of her life, some window had opened, some hope had dawned.

One day Humphrey asked her about her life in Paris.

“You don’t find it as dull as you thought you would, do you?” he said.

“Yes—no, I don’t know,” answered Charlotte, startled and confused, and colouring very much, “that is, there is—there are some things—I cannot tell you; it is very dull at home.”

“What do you do with yourself all day?” asked

Humphrey; "do you go out much? That is never dull in Paris; there is always so much to see."

"Is there?" said Charlotte, "but I generally go out with Aunt Maria, and we don't go to see anything; we pay visits. Aunt Maria says it is time for me to be introduced, and I am to go to all the balls this winter."

"Well, you will like that, will you not?" said the lad.

"No, I don't think I shall," answered Charlotte; "it tires me to dance, and Aunt Maria always tells me I am awkward. I don't think I shall like it much."

"That is a pity," said Humphrey, "I should have thought you liked dancing, I cannot fancy that you would ever be awkward, Miss Grey. What do you like doing?" he added with a smile.

"I don't know," said Charlotte, frankly; then, after some reflection, "I like being with the Princess Zaraikine," she said. "I am always happy when she comes to fetch me; she is so good, and wise, and beautiful, I think there is no one like her in the world. And I like coming here because you are all so kind; and I like going out with Henriette sometimes in the Tuileries Gardens, when it is warm and sunny, and I can sit and listen to the music, and watch the babies and the children playing about."

I am so fond of little children, and you are too, Mr. Randolph, are you not? You have so many drawings of them in your sketch-book."

"I like drawing them," answered Humphrey, "and I like them for themselves, too, sometimes," he added, looking down at Charlotte's upturned little face. It was impossible to think of Charlotte as anything but a child. Mr. Fleming, who was fond of her, and treated her with an unvarying kindness, used to say that there was something pathetic about her—as if she had been dropped into the world and lost her way there.

"The evenings are the worst," Charlotte continued, "for when Aunt Maria is at home, we all sit and work, and Rose and I read a big book of history by turns; and if I listen, it sends me to sleep; and if I don't listen, I don't know what we have been reading about, and Aunt Maria is angry."

"That is a hard case," said Humphrey, laughing, "I should always go to sleep if I were you; you could not be expected to remember anything then."

"Do not listen to him, Charlotte," said Ersilia, smiling, as she came up to them. "You know," she said, smoothing back the girl's shining hair, "we agreed that you are going to read all sorts of

books, and learn about all sorts of things, that you may be a wise woman some day."

"But I don't know how," said Charlotte, looking helpless and frightened. Like all people of a diffident nature, she preferred the chance of being blamed for not attempting a thing, to that of being blamed for carelessness or dullness if she did not accomplish it. "I wish I were wise," she went on, "I wish I was like Rose. She is very clever and always remembers things, but I never can do anything."

"Indeed, I think you can," said Ersilia, "you learn languages easily, and you can sing, and embroider beautifully. You have learnt all those new stitches I showed you, and can do them better than I can now. See, here is a pattern that Mr. Fleming has been designing for the cushion you wished to work; you will like to do that, will you not? And I do not know why you should not learn other things as well—things that would show you that we need never find life quite dull and uninteresting because there is always so much in it that is beautiful."

Ersilia had that large faith in human nature which springs from a loving heart and wide imaginative sympathies; but she had also, at that time, her share of the inexperience of youth, and her

faith took the form of believing in the latent power of everyone to accept those truths which she herself held to be amongst the best and noblest in life. It is a belief to which all high natures cling—only after many failures, perhaps, do they learn to exchange it for the yet larger faith in the differing capacity for goodness in every human soul, and recognize that it is in searching out and discovering this that the truest wisdom lies. Our dim little Charlotte, at any rate, had no strength to follow in the path along which Ersilia would willingly have led her. She loved the Princess Zaraikine and clung to her as to a superior being, one who had power to bring change and light into her dull round of cheerless days, but she felt vaguely that she was out of sympathy with her, and the fact may explain how it was that Ersilia was not at this time a stronger influence in the girl's life. Something there was at work in Charlotte, something that would often set her musing with her embroidery lying neglected before her, but it was not Ersilia's presence. What could she be thinking of? Humphrey sometimes could not help speculating.

He was not left to speculate long. About this time he began to come much less to the studio; only a few days after the above conversation, one of his old London fellow-students passing through

Paris on his way to Rome, gave him an excuse for absenting himself, and he hardly saw Charlotte for a time, but he was destined to become before long, in a wholly unlooked-for way, intimately acquainted with her affairs.

CHAPTER XVII.

Charlotte Again.

ONE dark December evening, about eight o'clock, Humphrey was mounting the stairs to his room at a somewhat less rapid pace than usual. The lad's heart was heavy; he had been dining at a restaurant with some acquaintances for whose society he did not care, and he had left them soon after dinner on the plea that he had some work that he must finish at home; but the work itself had but little interest for him, and he was half repenting his decision as he thought of the solitary hours to be spent in a room where of late gloomy thoughts and moods seemed always standing ready on the threshold to receive him. Humphrey's heart was often heavy in those days, when as it seemed to him, through no special volition on his part, but through a natural sequence of emotions he was gradually drifting away from his old life, and from all that had made that life worth living.*

The staircase, as I have said, was ill-lighted, but a dim oil-lamp burned here and there, and as

Humphrey reached the second landing, he was arrested by seeing a little figure come flying down the upper flight of stairs. It was a girl, running so impetuously that her foot slipped, and she only saved herself from falling down the last step by catching hold of the balustrade. As she paused to take breath and recover herself, she looked round with a startled glance; a pair of frightened dark eyes met Humphrey's, and he recognised Charlotte Grey.

"Miss Grey!" he said, in extreme astonishment.

She started and turned quite white at the sound of his voice, shrinking against the wall, with her hands pressed back, as if she would willingly have shrunk out of sight altogether. There was a moment's pause.

"Did I startle you?" said Humphrey at last, "I am very sorry."

"No, oh no," she answered, "only I did not know who it was—I did not expect to see you here."

"Don't you know that I live in this house?" said the lad, "I have a room up at the top. Surely you are not here all alone?" he added, unable to conceal the surprise that he felt at seeing the girl there at such an hour.

"Oh, no, Henriette is there, she said she would wait for me outside," she answered; then looking at him with eyes still wide with fright, "do you live here?" she said, "in a room at the top of the house?"

A door opened just behind them, and a man brushed past, turning again to look at the two as he made his way downstairs. Humphrey felt that they could not stand talking there any longer.

"Don't you think we had better go?" he said, "let me see you downstairs; this house is full of people, and there are always a good many about."

She took his arm, and they went downstairs silently. In the covered courtyard below they found a white-capped maid, who came up to them.

"*Allons*, Mademoiselle, we must make haste," she said sharply, staring at Humphrey as she spoke, "Mademoiselle Rose will be back by half-past nine, and that dress of Madame's must be finished before she comes in to-night."

"Are you going home?" said Humphrey to Charlotte, "you are not going to walk, surely. Have you no carriage here? Let me call you one; it is much too long a walk for you to the Rue du Helder at this hour of the evening."

It was dark and drizzling outside. Without

further question Humphrey hailed a passing *remise*, and put Charlotte and the maid into it.

"Thank you," said Charlotte, "but I would rather have walked. I—I want to speak to you. Please come too," she went on in a distressed voice, as he shut the carriage door and wished her good-night, "please, I wish you would come too."

Humphrey hesitated, but at that moment the horse gave a start and a plunge, the maid gave a scream, and Charlotte looked frightened out of her wits again.

"I will see you safe home," he said. He jumped on the box beside the driver, and they went rattling along the lighted streets and quays. But when they stopped at the Rue du Helder, and Humphrey would again have said good-night, Charlotte still looked at him with imploring eyes.

"Please come in—only for one minute," she said, and without waiting for an answer, she ran quickly upstairs.

Humphrey could only follow. Mrs. Grey's apartment was on the second floor; the door was already open, and Humphrey passed through the entry into a small room where there were lights and a fire, and which opened into a larger drawing-room beyond. Charlotte had disappeared, but in a

moment she returned without her bonnet and cloak, which she had hurried to take off. Her colour had come back, but she still had a scared look, like a child suddenly found out in a fault.

"I only wanted to ask you—please, if you don't mind," she began, confusedly, and without any preamble, "if you won't tell any one that I have been out to-night, only Henriette knows, and she will not tell."

"Of course, I won't speak of anything you don't want mentioned," said Humphrey, then getting rather confused in his turn, he said awkwardly enough. "I hope you won't mind my telling you, Miss Grey, that I don't think that house is the sort of place you should go about in alone in the evening. You know a big Paris house of that kind is like a street. There are always people about, and you might be annoyed or frightened."

"Oh, I know," said Charlotte, with widening eyes. "I was frightened; but Henriette said she could not go up all those stairs, when there was not even a chair to sit down on at the top, so I was obliged to go alone. But I was very glad when I saw you, though I was startled at first. I did not know that you lived there; I never met you before."

"Before?" said the lad.

"Yes, I have been there twice before; not for myself, you know, it was to see some one who is very ill—but I mustn't tell you about him, it is a secret," said Charlotte, not without an air of importance. "At first, when you said that you lived at the top of the house too, I was afraid that you might know all about it, but I see that you don't."

"I don't, indeed," said Humphrey. He stood considering for a while; into what mischief was the girl running her foolish little head? He remembered her troubles, on which he had sometimes speculated, at the Eaux-Chaudes, and could not help connecting them with her proceedings now. "If you have a friend living in the same house that I am in," was all he could think of to say at last, "perhaps I could be of some use to you, if you would tell me how."

"But he said I was to tell no one anything about him," said Charlotte with a perplexed look, "and he is ill and so poor, and there is no one but me to go and see him—he used to be so kind to me—" she ended with a sob, and the tears that had gathered in her eyes whilst she was speaking, began to roll down her cheeks.

"I should like you to know about it," she said

presently, "but it is a great secret that he is there at all. He asked me if I could keep a secret, and I said 'yes,' and so I can. I didn't mean to tell you, I couldn't help meeting you on the stairs, could I?"

"Of course not, and you have told me nothing that need distress you," said Humphrey, trying to comfort the poor little bewildered girl, who had begun to sob again. "Don't cry, please," he said, "only tell me if I can't be of some use to you. Does no one know anything about this who could help you—not the—Princess Zaraikine, or anyone?"

"No, oh, no!" said Charlotte, looking frightened, "he said I was not to tell her, or anyone, that he is here. He didn't say you, though," she added, "he doesn't know about you, and perhaps, as you live in the same house, you could go and see him, and that might do him good."

"I would go with pleasure if you think your friend would like it," said Humphrey, really anxious to help the girl, but not clearly seeing his way to it, "only—I don't want to learn your secrets, you know, and I think you would do better to tell them to some one else; to your aunt or to the Princess Zaraikine, who would give you much better advice, if you wanted it, than I can."

"But it isn't a secret any longer, if you know he is there," said Charlotte, rather ruefully. "I didn't mean to tell you, but I don't think he will mind your knowing, because you are kind and will be able to help him. I have known him for a long time. He used to give me lessons in French and German when we were in Brussels last winter, but after we went away he was very ill and had to give up teaching. Then he got better and came to Paris, but now he is ill again, and cannot give lessons, or write, or do anything to earn money."

Charlotte, in spite of her remorse at having betrayed the secret, was evidently not without a sense of pleasure at having something to tell, and some one to tell it to; but, towards the end of her speech, the corners of her mouth began to fall, and the tears came tumbling down again, whilst Humphrey stood puzzling over this perplexing confidence.

"How did you know he was in Paris?" he said at last. "Did he come here?"

"No, he wrote to me—he used to write to me sometimes. I had a letter from him at the Eaux-Chaudes, but I told the Princess Zaraikine about it one evening, and she said that I ought not to have letters that Aunt Maria knew nothing about. I never thought of that before, he was so kind to

me. But I didn't write to him again after she said that; only when I knew he was in Paris, and so ill and poor, I could not help going to see him. He has only one room to live in, and no money to pay the doctor or anything."

"Surely he did not take mon——," Humphrey began in indignation, but checked himself.

"No, oh no!" cried the girl hastily, startled by his tone, and blushing scarlet with some consciousness or embarrassment that made her look less childish than Humphrey had ever seen her before. Was she speaking the truth? No one, I believe, ever knew the whole truth of this story, of which Charlotte's account now was filling the lad with a sense of wrath and repulsion towards the chief actor in it such as he had never felt before. Charlotte was too simple and guileless as her present conduct proved, to imagine or carry out any preconcerted scheme with success; but she had not the clear, instinctive sense of truth which belongs to stronger and nobler natures, perhaps, than hers, and moreover she had that tendency to concealment which is the inevitable result of harshness on a timid mind. No one, I say, ever knew the whole truth, not even Ersilia, though Charlotte had confided some of her troubles to her at the Eaux-Chaudes—certainly not Humphrey. And yet the

story, as he learned it, partly now from the girl herself, partly later on from other sources, was a common-place one enough.

During the previous winter in Brussels, Mrs. Grey, always dutifully intent on improving her niece's puzzled little brain, had engaged for her instruction a certain Monsieur Rossel, who had been recommended to her, as a competent teacher of such French and German literature as was suitable for a young lady of Charlotte's age and position. Rose did not share these studies, and Mrs. Grey being, as we know, a person of many and varied engagements, Charlotte generally took her lessons protected by the presence of her maid Henriette. One day, Monsieur Rossel coming in, found Charlotte in floods of tears over a copy-book whose pages were sullied by nothing but the great drops that were fast inundating it. Monsieur Rossel, imperturbable setter of Procrustean tasks to a dozen young ladies in turn, had left the girl a lesson to prepare altogether beyond her powers. Her aunt, coming in and finding it undone, had scolded her, Monsieur Rossel was coming and would scold her more, and all, so far as she could see, for no preventable fault on her part. Life had thus suddenly become a problem altogether too sad and too perplexing for our little Charlotte.

Here was a pathetic tragedy for an imperturbable master of literature to fall upon! Monsieur Rossel, who was not really imperturbable, and a teacher through circumstances only, and through vocation, was apparently equal to the task of comforting his little pupil, who, as we know, was fair and pretty, and had simple, winning looks for those who were kind to her. He assured her that nothing in the world could be of less consequence than her lesson, that he would explain to her aunt that it was only he, and not she at all who had been to blame, and that she should have no difficulties with him for the future. Such a solution of her insoluble problem seemed like a dream to Charlotte, accustomed to find herself always in the wrong without knowing why. From that day, Monsieur Rossel had all the gratitude, and more than gratitude perhaps, of a little heart in which the most trivial occurrences assumed the proportions of momentous events. The master seems to have kept his promise, and to have troubled the girl with no more difficulties. The formal lessons in French and German literature were exchanged for instructive conversations in those languages, and it was probably in the course of these that Monsieur Rossel presently began to hint at fallen fortunes and unmerited sufferings; and Charlotte, though innocent of romances, had

doubtless heard enough of Polish Counts and Royal adventurers, for her small imagination to begin working. Who knows what else? Was Monsieur Rossel on his side attracted by this simple, tender little heart, which was ready to respond to the first appeals to its affection and compassion? Something he seems to have said of a happier future in store for her if she would trust to him, of a home far removed from all harshness and unkindness; but Charlotte, unused to friendly words, may easily have interpreted commonplace expressions amiss. Who shall say? The girl, as everyone knew, would have a large fortune when she came of age, and in the meantime was supplied by her guardians, as Humphrey had happened incidentally to learn, with a more than usually liberal allowance. This part of the story, which came only through her own confused statements, was never quite cleared up.

At the end of the season, Mrs. Grey left Brussels, and darkness fell once more upon Charlotte, a darkness hardly relieved by M. Rossel's occasional letters.

"When I heard from him at the Eaux-Chaudes that he was so ill, I was very unhappy," she said, "I thought that he was going to die, and that I should never see him again; and then when I mightn't answer his letter, that he would think I

had forgotten him. But at last I got a letter to say he was in Paris, and to ask me to go and see him."

"The sneaking scoundrel!" Humphrey had nearly said aloud, but checked himself as he met Charlotte's appealing eyes. "I will go and see him," he said instead, "you say he lives in the same house that I do; will you tell me where I shall find him?"

"He lives on the top story, the first floor to the left of the staircase," replied Charlotte. Then beginning to quiver a little. "Do you think he will be angry with me for telling you?" she said. "Please, I think, I had rather you didn't go."

"On the top story, the first door to the—why, then, I believe I have seen him," said Humphrey, astonished, but rather relieved, "an old man with white hair."

"Yes, he is old, but I think not very old," Charlotte answered, "his hair is white, but that is because he has been ill and in trouble. He told me that it was quite light like mine, two or three years ago. Do you know him? Do you think he will be angry with me?"

"I saw him on the stairs one night—he looked very ill," said Humphrey. "I don't think he will

be angry with you; I will go and see him, and explain how it was, and then, if you like, I will let you know sometimes how he is."

"But that won't be the same to me as going myself," said Charlotte, piteously, "it makes the days seem quite different when I can see him. He lets me talk as much as I like, and never thinks me foolish."

"But I don't think you ought to see him without your aunt's permission," said Humphrey, speaking straight out at last, as if to a child. "I don't think she would like you to go there without her knowledge."

"Oh, no, she would be very angry if she knew—but then she always is angry with me, so that does not make it any worse," said Charlotte, with unconscious philosophy. "I ought not to have gone out, I know, but I could not think of any other way to see him. Perhaps, when he is well again, he will come here."

"Perhaps he will; that will be all right," said Humphrey. "Shall I tell him that you will not be able to go and see him again at present?"

"I—mayn't I write him a note for you to take?" said Charlotte flushing up, and with tears trembling in her eyes again; "please, I *must* write to him, he will think me so unkind."

She ran to the table and began writing with hurrying fingers. In a few minutes she returned to Humphrey with a note which the lad had not the heart to refuse. It was addressed in her childish, unformed hand, to M. Rossel, Rue de Seine.

"I have told him I can't come again just now," she said, "please, will you let me know soon how he is? Only I never see you now—you don't come to the studio. But I shall want to hear; and you won't say anything about it to anyone else?"

"Of course not," answered Humphrey, rather indignant, "but will you let me advise you, Miss Grey, to tell all your story to the Princess Zaraikine? She will be able to help you if anyone can"—"and keep you from getting into any more mischief," he had nearly added.

"Yes, I know. Thank you, you are very kind," she said. Then lifting her eyes to his with the gentle look in them that had won more than one heart for little Charlotte, she said, "There are a great many kind people in the world, I think; I used to fancy there were none."

"Indeed, I cannot imagine how anyone can be unkind to you," said Humphrey, as he took her little hand in his, and left the room. And, in fact, he would as soon have thought of being unkind to

a little bird flying giddily round its nest, as it tries its wings for the first time.

So these had been Charlotte's troubles, Humphrey thought to himself, as he walked along with her poor little note in his pocket, and a great deal of compassion in his heart for the little stray girl whose childish faults might end by crushing her woman's life. What would become of Charlotte, with the dull hours of which she took such weary count? Randolph already dimly felt what he has often thought since, that the sorrows of which we hear so much in the world, misunderstood genius, unappreciated talent, thwarted ambitions, and the like, are not perhaps, amongst the worst. For them there is compensation in the very powers that work discontent. There are sorrows more pitiful than these—the sorrows of dim natures with no clear vision beyond the small successive events of their own lives, with no wide sympathy with unpersonal interests in which to forget their personal troubles, with no sense of the worth of that suffering which brings with it a comprehension of the sufferings of humanity. Nothing, I think, can be sadder than the unexpectant dullness that seems to gather on the faces of those who share in the common deprivations of life, without power to grasp the splendour also common to all who can open their hearts

to receive it. And if Christianity only, perhaps, in its divine freedom from scorn, can solve the problem of natures such as these, Christianity itself too often reaches them through the channel of some complex creed, robbed of its simplest truths and clearest inspirations.

So Randolph vaguely felt even then, as he walked along, musing upon dim little Charlotte and her troubles.

It was still early when Humphrey reached home; he could see a light shining under M. Rossel's door, and with Charlotte's note in his pocket, he resolved to call upon his neighbour and deliver it, if possible, that very night. He knocked. A voice from within cried, "Come in!" and he entered the room, of which he had already had a passing glimpse.

In size and shape it was the counterpart of his own, but a screen drawn across the middle converted the lower half into a warm interior, where M. Rossel sat in a large arm-chair by a table set in front of the fire. Humphrey recognized him at once, and he saw also that Charlotte's supposition that he was not very old, was a correct one. The lines on his face were of suffering rather than of age; his blanched hair was abundant, and together with his short beard and moustache, had the faint

gilded look peculiar to yellow hair that is turning white; his grey-blue eyes were narrow, dim, and half-closed. He might have been any age between forty and sixty; he was, in fact, about forty-eight.

He was not alone. Opposite to him, in front of the fire, stood a long-faced, red-whiskered man, well-dressed, and with a travelling-bag swinging in his hand.

"I can only say, Monsieur, that you've played me a shabby trick—a most confoundedly shabby trick," he was saying angrily, as Humphrey came into the room; "but it's of no use to discuss the matter any further, and as I must leave for Brussels to-night, I have the honour to wish you good-evening."

"Wait a minute—there's no hurry," said M. Rossel. His voice, though hoarse and feeble, was pleasant; his accent not Parisian, but better than that of his Belgian companion. "Upon my honour," he said, "I am very sorry; I had no wish to throw you over, but when a man is as hard up as I am he must look after his own interests."

"It's as shabby a trick as ever I knew," repeated the other with increasing irritation. "Why the articles you promised me are advertised—advertised by me in this month's *Revue*, and what the devil

will my subscribers think when they see the whole series appear in the *Chronique* instead?"

"That you were a fool to advertise before your agreement was signed and settled, I should say," answered M. Rossel.

"Well, Monsieur, well, there is nothing more to be said. I was a fool, no doubt—no doubt I was a fool; but I had your promise, and I trusted to your honour. I thought, Monsieur, you would look upon it as a matter in which your honour was engaged."

"Not at all," answered M. Rossel; "I looked upon it simply as a matter of business. Excuse me," he said, turning to Humphrey, who was standing by the screen uncertain whether to advance or retreat, "will you find yourself a chair? No, don't go away, I shall be at your service in one minute. Look here, now," he went on to the Belgian editor, "I don't want to quarrel with you. We have done very well together hitherto, and if we can come to any arrangement now, nothing could please me better."

"What arrangement, Monsieur? what arrangement is possible? I can't pretend to offer you more than the Editor of the *Chronique*. I am an honest man, M. Rossel, and I can't afford to bribe

my contributors. At the same time, you have put me in a confoundedly awkward position, and if you have anything reasonable to propose I am willing to listen to it."

"Well, look here," said M. Rossel again, "the fact is I am so hard up that I am obliged to sacrifice something for the sake of present convenience. You have the advantage of me, and that's the truth. Suppose, for instance, you could make it convenient to come to some settlement before leaving Paris? But sit down again, and let us talk it over."

The Belgian drew a chair to the table, and the two men began to talk in undertones, whilst Humphrey, embarrassed by his awkward position, stood studying an old black engraving that hung upon the wall. Presently, however, M. Rossel spoke again, and in a louder voice.

"I suppose you will want me to sign these papers," he said; "and how the devil I am to do it with my hands crippled like this, I don't know. I must trouble you to write the receipt, and I will put my name to it as best I can."

He took up a pen as he spoke with a hand which, as Humphrey now saw, was so bandaged and swollen as to be nearly powerless, and scrawled his name on one or two papers in succession. The

Belgian placed them in a pocket-book, then rising took up his bag and prepared to depart.

"Upon your word and honour now, M. Rossel, you won't disappoint me again," he said. "I assure you that, to a man in my position, this sort of thing is ruin—absolute ruin."

"Confound it! I have signed your papers, what more do you want?" said M. Rossel. "You shall have your articles all in good time; if not, you had better come back to Paris and reclaim your money. *Bon voyage.*"

He nodded as the Belgian left the room, then turning to Humphrey again, scrutinised him with his dim eyes.

"I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting," he said; "pray sit down. You must excuse my want of ceremony, but I am tied hand and foot, as you see."

"I am only come on a message," said Humphrey, advancing into the circle of lamplight, but standing with his hand on the back of a chair. "Miss Grey begged me—I have brought you a letter from Miss Grey."

"From Miss Grey," said M. Rossel, raising his eyebrows slightly. He took Charlotte's letter,

glanced through it, then looked up at Humphrey again.

"I must explain," said the lad, getting rather red and embarrassed, "it was by the merest accident that I met Miss Grey on the stairs to-night, and learnt that she knows you."

"It was no matter," answered M. Rossel, "I did not want all Paris to hear of my arrival, but, of course, I knew she would tell some one. Sit down, will you not? I do not often have any visitors except the porter's wife, and a confounded doctor who does not understand my complaints. You are my neighbour, I think? It was you who were good enough to unlock my door for me, one night, if I am not mistaken."

"Yes," said Humphrey, "I live in the room opposite."

"Exactly. Well, you rendered me a service, I have been in no need of again. It was the door of my prison that you opened—I have not been able to stir from my room since."

There was a touch of querulousness in the tone of these last words, which, together with the helpless condition of a strongly-made man, moved the lad to pity. He forgot Charlotte and his indigna-

tion, and, drawing a chair forward, he sat down at the table.

"You are English?" M. Rossel began again. "Not travelling for pleasure, I suppose, or you would hardly be staying here?"

"I live in Paris—I am an artist," replied Humphrey.

"An artist? Working in some French studio, probably? You look hardly old enough to be independent."

"I work in the studio of an English artist," said Humphrey, wondering a little at this frank catechism. "I am a pupil of Mr. Fleming's; you have heard of him, I daresay. Everyone has."

"Fleming—," said M. Rossel, "I knew something of an artist of that name in Rome some years ago, but I don't know if it was the same man."

"It is very possible," said Humphrey. "Mr. Fleming lived in Rome for several years, I know."

"I had no personal acquaintance with him," said M. Rossel, "and I don't suppose he ever heard my name, but he was concerned in an affair in which I took some little interest. He had some reputation of an artist even then, I believe, though it is many years ago."

"It was my master, I have no doubt," said Humphrey, "I know of no other painter of the name. He has a great reputation now," the lad went on, "everyone knows him and comes to his studio."

He spoke with his old eager pride in his master's fame, but his sentence ended in a sigh. His head dropped, his voice sank; those old days seemed no more.

"I have never mixed at all with artists," said M. Rossel, "and I know only enough about pictures to be conscious of my own ignorance. I might care more for them, perhaps, if I understood them better."

He made some slight movement as he spoke, and an open book, propped on a pile of volumes on the table before him, slipped and fell to the ground. Humphrey started forward, picked it up, and replaced it before M. Rossel, whose feeble and reluctant movements showed him to be incapable of any exertion.

"Thank you," he said, as Humphrey tried to prop up the volumes more securely, "you see what a helpless log I am. I can manage to turn over the leaves, and that is about all."

"That is dreadful," said Humphrey, impulsively,

"is there no one to be with you? Surely, Monsieur, you ought not to be here all alone."

"The porter's wife looks after me," he answered, "and bores me to death. If there is a thing on earth I hate, it is a woman who potters and nurses. My doctor, who is a fool, wanted me to stay in bed and have a *sœur*; but I told him that if I was going to die, it should be in a chair, without any confounded white cap flitting before my eyes. I do very well; not but that it is confoundedly hard to be tied here in this way—most confoundedly hard."

"It must be—I can't bear to think of it," said Humphrey, with the eager and wondering pity of youth for suffering altogether alien to its own experience. "I don't know if I could be of any use to you," he went on, after a moment's pause and with some embarrassment, "but I am so close at hand, and if there were anything I could do for you, I should be very glad."

"Thank you, you are very good," said M. Rossel, "but you are out all day, I suppose? You have your own work to attend to?"

"That is no matter," said Humphrey, getting red, "at least—I mean, I can leave it for the present. It does not signify."

"Thank you," said M. Rossel again. He sat

considering for a minute, "I really don't like to trouble you," he said, at last, "but the fact is, if you could spare me a few hours, you might be of great service to me. I have promised the editor of the Brussels *Revue Contemporaine*—that gentleman you saw here just now—a series of papers on the progressive state of society in the principal cities of Europe during the last hundred years. The first article ought to be ready by the end of the month, and I don't want to disappoint the poor devil if I can help it—besides, it might create some awkwardness which it is always best to avoid, if possible. Now I can't write, as you may see; but the notes and materials are all ready, and if you could help me in arranging them and writing from my dictation, you would be doing me a service for which I should be grateful."

"I shall be delighted," said Humphrey, "and I will do my best, though I am afraid I don't know much about that sort of work."

"There will be no difficulty, and I don't think you will find the subject a dull one. The papers are all in that portfolio—no, I won't ask you to look them over to-night," as Humphrey got up, "but any time to-morrow, I shall be ready for you. I am always at home, and generally alone, so we shall have no interruptions."

"Very well, I shall come to-morrow morning," said Humphrey, and left the room as the porter's wife, fresh, smiling, and benevolent, made her appearance at the door.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A New Friend.

CHARLOTTE had spoken truly in saying that she no longer met Humphrey at the studio; it was now some weeks since the lad had given up going there regularly. A friend passing through Paris had been his excuse for absenting himself in the first instance; but when his friend was gone, he still kept away. The old life under its altered conditions seemed insupportable to him, and he held aloof from it with feelings that he would have found it hard to define; even to himself he would hardly have acknowledged that he was cherishing a growing resentment towards Mr. Fleming, as an outlet for his vague feeling of resentment against fate. Our troubles are not the less hard, but sometimes the harder to bear when they seem shaped for us by the fateful working of circumstances, and not by a visible hand. In the dull feeling of antagonism to his master, Humphrey found a definite sensation, which, whilst it increased his unhappiness tenfold, was yet in itself some sort of relief in the

midst of the black cloud that seemed to wrap him round and distort every familiar object. It was for him one of those times of nightmare oppression out of which there is no clear issue but through practical duty and renunciation. It was a lesson which the boy, who was only a boy, wayward and unreasonable enough in those days, had yet to learn; but it was a lesson he was destined before long to see written as in letters of fire across his life.

In the first weeks indeed he still made his appearance from time to time in the studio, making such excuses as he could for his absence; and Mr. Fleming, however used to his pupil's varying moods and fits of silence, became aware at length of some definite change in his tone and spirits.

"Are you not well, my boy?" he said to him one day.

The kind voice, unconscious of offence went to the lad's heart.

"I—I am not very well," he said, "I think I will leave my work for to-day, if you can spare me;" and laying down his brushes, he abruptly left the room. The next morning he came at an early hour, and painted steadily the whole day. His work would not go; he had lost the inspiration of his picture and could not immediately recover it;

but he worked on nevertheless till dusk. Ersilia did not come, and Mr. Fleming was out the greater part of the day. In the evening, Humphrey carefully cleaned his palette and brushes, put them aside, and returned no more.

This was shortly after his first visit to M. Rossel; nor could he, I think, have held to his dogged resolution to avoid all that he most cared for in life, but for this new interest and occupation that he had found. A genuine compassion for the lonely and suffering man filled Randolph's mind; for some weeks he was constantly with him, and a friendship, that under other circumstances could hardly have arisen, sprang up naturally between the two. M. Rossel on his side professed (and neither then nor afterwards had Randolph any reason to doubt the truth of these professions) a sincere gratitude and affection for the lad, who indeed did his best to nurse and cheer him, sitting up with him more than once at night, and devoting to him a good part of each day. I do not know whether he carried his sincerity and honest purpose written in his face, or whether Charlotte's letter had been a testimonial in his favour; but certain it is that M. Rossel accepted these services without further question. They were services willingly rendered. Apart from the natural goodwill that made him

glad to give help where help was so much needed, Humphrey felt pleased and flattered, as became his years, by the confidence placed in him by a man so much his superior in experience, talent, and learning, as he soon discovered M. Rossel to be. The impressions with which he had begun the acquaintance passed away. He did not forget Charlotte, but her story faded into an episode over which he sometimes wondered a little, but with which he could not feel he had any especial concern.

What M. Rossel would have done at this time without Randolph's unexpected assistance, the lad could not even conjecture. The worst of his illness, indeed, was over when Humphrey first made his acquaintance; he soon began to recover strength from day to day, but he was slow in regaining the use of his hands, and in the meantime his articles for the Brussels *Revue* must have remained unwritten. What resources he had to fall back upon, Humphrey did not inquire. His help, as I have said, was gladly given, and M. Rossel, having once accepted his offer of assistance, soon gave him enough to do in copying, arranging, and writing from dictation. Humphrey liked the sort of work, which was new to him; the subject of the papers was an amusing one, and M. Rossel's notes revealed an amount of varied reading which to the

Randolph of those days, not long emancipated from school classics, seemed amazing. If, as he had afterwards reason to believe, M. Rossel managed to satisfy the claims of both the Brussels editors by means more ingenious than straightforward, he had no suspicion of it at the time, nor, being at an age when the sympathies are out of all proportion to the powers of reasoning, would he probably have credited the fact, had it been told him. When the first essay was finished, it was with as much pride as if he himself had been its author that he sent it off, and looked forward to the day when the number of the *Revue Contemporaine* in which it was to appear should be forwarded to them. That day never arrived for him; long before the article made its appearance, the brief episode in his life with which it was associated had come to an end; but only lately he came across some old numbers of the *Revue* containing these essays, and found that he could still admire the clearness of thought and brilliancy of expression that had struck him at the time he helped to write them. A softened feeling came over him, as he read, towards the man to whom he had devoted some hours of his youth; it was a feeling that bridged over the separating years of a fated antagonism and alienation. Randolph, however, did not spend the whole

of these dark mid-winter days with his new friend. He had made plenty of acquaintance by this time, and in idleness or amusement was in no want of companions. Two or three of these came to be in after days valued and life-long friends; others there were who did the lad no good, and who presently disappeared from his horizon. It is a part of his life that does not concern us here, except as it affected his whole conduct at that time. The boy was an honest-hearted boy enough on the whole, with no especial love for mischief, and I do not know that he came to much actual harm. Neither would his follies nor his scrapes, I think, have been serious, but for a spirit of recklessness that had seized him—a spirit that made him feel more and more as if he were drifting away from pure aims and noble ambitions, till the thought of past days and of Ersilia came to him as the thought of vanished happiness might come to one who looking from some outer darkness through barring gates, should see his loved ones walking amongst the flowers in the clearness of the evening light.

M. Rossel, who had a sick man's craving for the news from the outer world that seems to give a firmer hold on life, liked Humphrey to go out, and to tell him all he had been seeing and doing on his return. He liked to hear the lad talk, he

said, and used sometimes to question him about his early life; and Humphrey, who, like all people of a reserved nature, looked upon every confidence as momentous, felt a new friendship for this man as he told him of his grandfather, and his uncle, and his early life at the farm — memories still recent in those days, though already beginning to recede into how remote a past. M. Rossel, sitting in his arm-chair, appeared to take much interest in these fresh histories, which Humphrey related probably with the simplicity and earnestness we throw into subjects of supreme interest to ourselves.

“So you offended your uncle and lost a fortune because you had made up your mind to be an artist,” he said to the boy one day. “That does not say much for your wisdom, Randolph, as you will find out for yourself some time or other.”

“I don’t think so,” answered Humphrey; “I couldn’t live without painting, and I don’t care for money. If one has enough to live upon, I don’t see what more one can want.”

“One may want a good many things, my good fellow, if one has tastes above those of a plough-boy. It is all very well whilst you are young; a crust of bread with illusions goes a long way, I know. But thirty years hence, when you have painted your best and found out that you are not

the genius you think yourself now, when you have a wife perhaps of whom you are tired, and children who are tired of you, and have nothing to look forward to but twenty years or so of failing powers, things will appear very different."

"I don't know," said Humphrey, considering. He was trying, as was his fashion in those days, to bring his mind into sympathy with the last opinion he had heard. "Thirty years hence," he said at last, "I hope to be a great artist; if I am not, I shall be so disappointed that I shall not care for anything else. Of course I shall sell my pictures when they are painted, so that I shall always have enough to live upon. I shall never marry."

"That is a wise resolution that you are not likely to keep. But even if you don't marry, you will find out by-and-by that there are a great many pretty things of all sorts in the world worth having if you can afford to pay for them. However, I don't want to preach a sermon you won't believe in; only I am sorry for your own sake you have made up your mind to be an artist."

"Why?" said the lad. "I think it is the most splendid calling upon earth."

"Well, to speak frankly, I do not. From what I know of artists, I have no great liking for them, I own. They create a haze, and look at the world

through it, and then damn everyone who is not of their way of thinking. I don't speak of you, Randolph, I like you; but then I think you were meant for something better than spending your life in a love-sick straining after transcendental ideas."

"I don't know what you mean," said Humphrey, flushing up and indignant. "It is because artists see more than others," he went on with great originality, "and have the power to reveal it, that they are artists. They have more, not less insight than the rest of the world."

"There are different kinds of insight, my good boy. If you go to the bottom of a well you will see the stars by daylight, but you will see nothing else. You may call it a prejudice if you will—I am old enough to own to prejudices—but I confess that your whole race of poets, artists, sentiment-mongers of every degree, are antipathetic to me."

Humphrey looked up astonished. M. Rossel had spoken as men use to do who speak from impulse and feeling, not from motive, and the lad's instinctive surprise now first revealed to him perhaps how rare this was with M. Rossel.

"I resent the whole system as one of imposture," he went on smiling, and more in his usual manner. "Nature has a great many pretty tricks; but they

are only tricks, and an artistic and poetic mythology founded on them is as unsound as any other mythology. And then you are apt to be such a melancholy set. You narrow your life into a groove, and seem to have no power of getting outside it again. I see the beginning of it in you already, Randolph, and I have found it true of others so far as my experience goes. Your master now, Mr. Fleming, should you call him a happy man?"

"Mr. Fleming!" said Humphrey, with a sudden uncontrollable emotion, "Mr. Fleming not happy? He is the happiest man on earth. He is going to be married to the most adorable—" He stopped short. The words had escaped him involuntarily; in all his confidences to M. Rossel he had never yet mentioned the Princess Zaraikine.

"Indeed! Then his happiness does not surprise me," said M. Rossel. "This is beside the question, but it interests me, Randolph. Mr. Fleming is going to be married to the most adorable woman—might one without indiscretion inquire who she is?"

"I don't know why I should not tell you," said Humphrey, recovering himself, "he is going to marry the Princess Zaraikine."

There was a moment's pause before M. Rossel answered.

"The Princess Zaraikine—" he said, "I have heard my little pupil, Miss Grey, mention a Princess Zaraikine: is it the same? She spoke of her as a friend, but she did not tell me that she was going to be married."

"She may not have known it at the time," said Humphrey. "It is no secret, but the marriage will not be till late in the spring, and it is not much talked of. There is no reason why Miss Grey should not have mentioned it."

"And in your eyes she is the most adorable—that is awkward for you, my young friend."

"She is my cousin," answered Humphrey shortly, "and almost the only relation I have in the world."

"Your cousin; how can that be? She is English then?"

"Her mother was English," said Humphrey, "and she spent all her childhood in England. She always looks upon herself as an Englishwoman."

"I understand—yes, I remember Miss Grey spoke of her as being English. You will wonder at these questions," M. Rossel went on after a moment's reflection, "but what you say confirms me in the idea that my old friend Prince Zaraikine was the husband of this lady. He married a young English girl."

"And deserted her," cried Humphrey. "I beg your pardon, M. Rossel, if he was your friend, but everyone knows that history and how ill he used his wife."

"Prince Zaraikine was my friend," said M. Rossel, "and I know more about his history, I daresay, than any one else. It has two sides to it, like most other histories. People do neither good nor harm gratuitously in this world. There is cause and effect in everything."

"I fail to conceive any adequate cause for a man's deserting his young wife, I must own," said Humphrey impetuously; "it seems to me a piece of cold-blooded scoundrelism."

"Of course it does. You young fellows always run your heads against a wall, and then wonder you can't see anything on the other side. Zaraikine probably saw the matter in a different light from that in which you see it. He was obliged to marry for money; but he had no wish to form an establishment, and he didn't want a wife. He was already in love with one of the handsomest and most brilliant women in Europe, and why should he trouble himself about a little school-girl?"

"But she was his wife," said the lad.

"Very true, my good boy; but, as I have just

said, he didn't marry her because he wanted a wife, but because he wanted money. He got the money, and his wife returned to live with her relations. It was quite simple, and she was much better off, if she had but known it."

"When a man like that, without honour, without principles, without morality," said Humphrey, indignant and stammering, "when a man like that marries, one cannot wonder at his deserting his wife, or at any other baseness. But I own I don't understand how any one can defend him."

"I don't defend him, my good fellow; it is not a question of defence; the thing was inevitable. When you have a wife, Randolph, you will perhaps understand how small a proportion a man's married life may bear to the whole, and that if he cultivates varied interests, he must of necessity have an existence apart from his domestic affairs. Zaraikine, who had lived more than forty years in the world before he set eyes on his wife, had probably other things to do with his honour and his principles, and his morality, than to devote them to making the happiness of a little girl who, for the rest, was the last woman in the world to suit him. I saw her once at Vienna, shortly after her marriage; a pale girl, with handsome hair and eyes, but she had not the art *de se faire valoir* in society,

and at home must have been the dullest company in the world."

Humphrey sat silent; he was uneasy and wrathful, with a certain revulsion of feeling towards M. Rossel that he could not at once overcome. He had never liked him so little as at that moment. M. Rossel perceived it perhaps, for as the lad began putting his writing materials together with the intention of leaving for the night, he spoke again.

"You don't agree with me, I see, Randolph," he said: "and after all I am not sure but that you are right. It might have been better for Zاراикине, as things turned out, to have stood by his little Hausfrau. It could not well have turned out worse for him, poor fellow. You know the end of his history, I daresay?"

"I know what every one else knows," said Humphrey, "that he was mixed up in some Polish conspiracy through his intimacy with a Polish lady, and lost his life in attempting to escape from Russia."

"Well, that is hardly a correct version. Zاراикине had nothing to do with the conspiracy; he never even heard of it. A man may be in love with a woman without finding it a reason for betraying

his country, and risking his own life. Zaraikine, who was fool enough in some ways, was not fool enough for that. It was the Countess who managed to implicate him—how, was never exactly known—and to save her son, who was concerned in the affair, sacrificed her lover.”

“The woman he was in love with?” said Humphrey.

“Yes. She had great force of character and was devoted, it appears, to this son. Zaraikine, I believe, thought she was devoted to him; but there are certain points upon which women are incalculable. I do not know how she received the news of his death.”

“Is it true that he was drowned?” said Humphrey. “That was the story I heard.”

“Yes, that is true enough,” said M. Rossel. “He was drowned in attempting to cross a river. A party of soldiers had been sent to arrest him on the frontier; he shot the officer in command and jumped into the water, with the intention of swimming across. The stream was not wide, and there were friends waiting to give him a helping hand on the opposite bank; but it was in the dusk of a winter evening, and the current was strong and encumbered with blocks of ice; he was carried away before their eyes—”

"You were there?" said Humphrey, with keen interest.

"Yes—" he said gloomily, "I was there. After all there was nothing perhaps to regret," he went on after a minute; "if we had saved him it might have been for a life worse than death. The young officer whom he shot was the son of a Minister high in Court favour, and there is no corner of Europe to which the Russian Government would not have pursued him. It is better as it is."

Humphrey did not answer. Somehow, this story, in which he might have read only a just retribution, had also awakened in him a wider sense of compassion than he had yet known; a perception that in the most wayward lives that move us to a righteous indignation there may be tragedies that may also move us to pity.

Monsieur Rossel, too, was silent for some minutes. He had a book open before him, but he was not reading.

"Tell me something more of the Princess Zaraikine," he said, presently, "she is considered handsome now, you say?"

"I don't know," answered Humphrey, abruptly, "I don't know that I ever heard any one say so. It is a subject I never discussed."

"But you think her so yourself?"

The lad hesitated. "I beg your pardon," he said, flushing, "I had rather not talk to you of the Princess Zaraikine; to me she is unlike all other women, but you have seen her yourself, and from what you have said, I don't suppose you would understand."

"You are mistaken, Randolph," said M. Rossel closing his book and turning round, "when I saw the Princess Zaraikine she was a mere child. I may have thought her then an unfit wife for a man like Zaraikine, but she is probably very different now from what she was a few years ago. A girl of sixteen is not a woman at all; she has yet to develop every quality."

"I don't know," said Humphrey, "when I first saw the Princess Zaraikine, we were both children; and I believe I thought then as I think now, that there is something in her that sets her apart from every other woman upon earth."

"And that is—what?"

"How can I tell?" said Humphrey, quivering with impatience and starting up impetuously, "one does not analyse the most sacred influences that come to one in life—one accepts them."

"That is as it may be—some people like to analyse everything and find out what it is worth. But I don't want to trouble you, my good boy.

Only as an old friend of Zaraikine's, I feel some interest in his wife."

These last words sounded like a reproach, and disconcerted Humphrey, one of whose weaknesses in those days was an uneasy sensitiveness which was apt to make his most ardent impulses and steadiest resolutions alike fail before implied disapproval.

"What is it you want to know?" he said reluctantly after a pause, "nothing that I could say of the Princess Zaraikine would give you any idea of what she is, but I have a drawing of her that I can show you if you like."

He left the room, and presently returned with one of the best of the many likenesses he had tried to take of Ersilia. He laid it in silence before M. Rossel, who took it up and examined it attentively in the full light of the lamp.

"I see—it is a beautiful face," he said at length, "if this does not flatter her, she must be greatly improved. But there is something in the expression of the eyes that affects me unpleasantly; it is too dreamy and melancholy; and it contradicts that of the rest of the face, which is not dreamy. Is that your fault, Randolph, or have you been faithful to the original?"

"She has a thousand expressions—I suppose I have caught one of them," said Humphrey, "her eyes are never dreamy when she speaks."

"Then she would please me better," said M. Rossel, laying down the sketch, and leaning back in his chair, "why indeed should she look melancholy? She has youth, and beauty, it appears, and riches—she is rich, is she not?"

"I believe so—I don't know—I never inquired," said Humphrey.

He hardly knew what he was saying; he had taken up the drawing M. Rossel had laid down, and was studying it again with misty eyes, as he had studied it a hundred times before. Presently he looked up, M. Rossel was watching him.

"Well?" he said smiling.

There was kindness, or Humphrey thought so, as well as amusement in his smile, friendliness as well as sarcasm in his grey eyes, which had grown keen and clear in these last days, as the dimness of ill-health passed away. The lad's barrier of reserve broke down.

"I don't know how to live without her," he said, flinging his arms across the table, and in a voice broken by a sob, "and I can never be anything to her—never."

A wide converse with evil as with good is perhaps essential, is at any rate almost inevitable in this world. But there comes a perilous moment in all such varied intercourse, when, from whatever cause, the soul begins to waver in its pure instincts of right and wrong, and Randolph, as he left M. Rossel that evening, felt as though, in some such moment of uncertainty, he had allowed a desecrating light to fall within some shrine that held the hallowed symbols of his highest faith and aspirations.

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

BRITISH ANTHROPOLOGY

Poynter, Eleanor Frances

Ersilia

Bd.: 1

Leipzig 1876

P.o.angl. 307-3/4

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11335907-8